

INTRODUCTION



This book is intended for senior English majors, postgraduates and other learners of English as a reference book or a textbook. It tries to describe the multi-dimensional diversity of the English language in use from the perspective of modern linguistics, especially sociolinguistics, functional linguistics and text linguistics, focusing mainly on the relationship between language and contextual situation, and the various functions language performs in various kinds of socio-situational contexts. It is hoped that this book will prove to be a valuable source of reference by providing EFL (English as a foreign language) teachers with some linguistic insight into the workings of the English language. As a textbook, it will not only broaden students' knowledge of English but also improve their linguistic performance, i. e. , their ability to use their linguistic knowledge to solve problems in actual communication, and to learn to express themselves **appropriately** in English through imitating the native speakers in their use of the English language.

The book is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 chiefly deals with the theoretical aspects of language variation and the classification of varieties of English. Chapter 2 studies the user-related varieties where various types of dialects and the Standard English are discussed. Chapter 3 focuses on medium-related varieties, and the differences between spoken English and written English are explained in considerable detail. Chapter 4 analyzes attitude-related

varieties from the perspective of different degrees of formality, politeness, impersonality and intelligibility. Chapter 5 is solely devoted to function-related varieties, listing altogether eight functions with due emphasis on those varieties that perform referential, conative, and directive functions. The last chapter discusses literature-related varieties in general, and tries to show in two case studies how a piece of literary work is to be analyzed, interpreted and appreciated.

Chapter 1

LANGUAGE VARIETIES



English has now become a kind of international language, most widely used in the world; but there is one thing we must always bear in mind: like all other languages, the English language is not a homogenous phenomenon but a complex of many different varieties of language in use in many parts of the world in all kinds of situations for a wide range of functions.

The actual use of language either in speech or writing is linguistically called a **language event**, which is regarded as a form of human behavior. Like all other forms of human behavior, language use is subject to almost infinite variations. There are, for instance, the informal intimate speech of the home and between close friends, the slightly restrained speech of semi-public occasions, such as conversation with strangers, and the carefully chosen, deliberate language of public address on formal occasions. Moreover, scientists, technologists and other professional people, when talking shop among themselves, tend to use a special variety of their own — *technical English*, which is sometimes almost unintelligible to the

uninitiated outsiders, especially foreign learners of English. Here are some sample texts of technical language:

(1)

Malacostraca is a class of Crustacea. On the head are two compound eyes (typically stalked) biramous antennules, antennae with a scalelike exopodite, and three pairs of mouthparts; the eight-segmented thorax is typically covered by a carapace, on the first three segments are maxillipeds, and on the last five, walking legs; the abdomen has six (rarely seven) segments, the first five bearing biramous pleopods and the last a pair of broad uropods which, with the telson, form a tail-fan. (Zoology)

(2)

Ribbon synapse is an ultrastructurally distinct type of synapse found in a variety of sensory receptor cells such as retinal photoreceptor cells, cochlear hair cells and vestibular organ receptors, as well as in a non-sensory neuron, the retinal bipolar cell. Unlike most neurons, these cells do not use regenerative action potentials but release transmitter in response to small graded potential changes. Ribbon synapses have different exocytotic machinery from conventional synapses in containing dense bars or ribbons anchored to the presynaptic membrane covered with a layer of synaptic vesicles. The ribbons have been proposed to shuttle synaptic vesicles to exocytotic sites. In servomechanism, Type-0 has no integrating term and requires an offset signal, Type-1 has one integrating circuit in its closed loop and a velocity error while Type-2 has two integrating circuits and no errors. (Cell biology)

(3)

Root-mean-square value is the square root of the mean of the squares of continuous ordinates through one complete cycle of any alternating waveform. If there are harmonics of the fundamental, the total r. m. s. value is the sum of the r. m. s. values of the fundamental and the harmonics taken separately. (Physics)

An ordinary reader, if not very familiar with specialized knowledge of zoology, cell biology or physics, would find it difficult to understand passages of this kind. The main problem here, linguistically speaking, lies in its specialized vocabulary (technical jargon). But it is not the technical terms

alone that present comprehension problems to the foreign learners of English. Take a very common adjective “*fat*” for an example. It has numerous synonyms and synonymous expressions such as “*chubby*”, “*plump*”, “*matronly*”, “*heavy*”, “*portly*”, “*corpulent*”, “*stout*”, “*fleshy*”, “*gross*”, “*overblown*”, “*potbellied*”, “*double (thrice)-chinned*”, “*rotund*” and “*obese*”, to name but a few. They mean more or less the same thing, but each of them has its own different connotation and produces different stylistic effect. Melvyn Bragg in *Word of Mouth* estimates that there are 1300 words of telling someone that he is a fool, there are 1050 words for a slattem, and there are 1350 words meaning to give someone a thrashing. Of course, most of them are dialectal expressions and are dying out due to lack of popular use. But it does show the magnitude of the problem. To a native English speaker, it may take little mental effort to choose the appropriate word for the right occasion, but to foreign learners of English, who were not brought up in that language environment, it would not be so easy. Most of them have learned what is called **Standard English** through classroom lessons, so when they first come to study or work in a country where English is the mother tongue, they may find it a bit difficult to communicate with or even understand the native speakers. A true story told to this author will illustrate this point:

Miss Carroll, an American graduate student, got married to her Arabic teacher, a Jordanian professor who had taught in her school for quite a few years. Then the newlyweds went to Jordan to receive the blessings from the bridegroom’s parents. Just a few days later, the US State Department issued warnings of possible terrorist attack on Americans traveling in the Middle East. So they hurried back to the United States. At the Customs of the Atlanta International Airport, a female official, checking their passports, exclaimed: “From Jordan! *Got out of here.*” The husband, unable to understand this Appalachian dialectal expression of surprise, demanded to know what was wrong with their passports. The wife hastened to explain to him, and they had a good laugh over it.

Of course, variation of English takes place not only at lexical level, but also at all other levels of the language. Read the following examples and see how language events differ from one another:

Example A Different ways of asking the time

- (1) Excuse me, could you tell me the right time, please?
- (2) What time is it, please?
- (3) What's the time?
- (4) Time?
- (5) How's the enemy? (= How goes the enemy?)
- (6) How much longer have we got?
- (7) My watch seems to have stopped. . .

Many other possibilities remain, of course, but looking just at the examples listed above, we can see that the differences involve not only the length and complexity of the sentences but also the tone of each request. They are all correct English in that any one of them could be used by an educated speaker of English without a qualm provided it was used in an appropriate situation. Each of the above formulations would be appropriate in some situations, but inappropriate in others. Native speakers of English know intuitively which one to use on a certain occasion, but to foreign learners of English, it would be a great challenge to distinguish various shades of meanings and connotations, let alone **"use proper words in proper places."** In Example A, (1) is formal and polite in tone. It might be addressed to a stranger, for instance, a fellow passenger on a bus or a train. (2) might be termed "normal", i.e., neither formal nor informal, and could be used in many situations. (3), with its contracted verb form and omission of "please", might be considered as "informal" and could be used between ordinary friends and acquaintances. (4), with its telegraphic syntax, might be termed "familiar" or "intimate". It is, in fact, a typical exchange between family members or close friends. (5) is slangish. It may also come under the heading "familiar", and it may be used between workmates or fellow drinkers in a bar. (6) and (7) indicate a roundabout way of asking the time, revealing either a trait of timidity or an attempt to be polite and unobtrusive on the part of the speaker.

Example B Three extracts from literary works

(1)

The heaven being spread with this pallid screen and the earth with the darkest vegetation, their meeting-line at the horizon was clearly marked. In such contrast the heath wore the appearance of an instal-

ment of night which had taken up its place before its astronomical hour was come: darkness had to a great extent arrived hereon, while day stood distinct in the sky. Looking upwards, a furze-cutter would have been inclined to continue work; looking down, he would have decided to finish his faggot and go home. The distant rims of the world and the firmament seemed to be a division in time no less than a division in matter. The face of the heath by its mere complexion added half an hour to evening; it could in like manner retard the dawn, sadden noon, anticipate the frowning of storms scarcely generated, and intensify the opacity of a moonless midnight to a cause of shaking and dread.

(from *THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE* by Thomas Hardy)

(2)

Anyway, it was Saturday of the football game with Saxon Hall. The game with Saxon Hall was supposed to be a very big deal around Pencey. It was the last game of the year, and you were supposed to commit suicide or something if old Pencey didn't win. I remember around three o'clock that afternoon I was standing way the hell up on top of Thomsen Hill, right next to this crazy cannon that was in the Revolutionary War and all. You could see the two teams bashing each other all over the place. You couldn't see the grandstand too hot, but you could hear them all yelling, deep and terrific on the Pencey side, because practically the whole school except me was there, and scrawny and faggy on the Saxon Hall side, because the visiting team hardly ever brought many people with them.

(from *THE CATCHER IN THE RYE* by J. D. Salinger)

(3)

Once 'pon a time dey wuz a monsus mean man, en he live 'way out in de prairie all' lone by hisself, 'cep'n he had a wife. En bimeby she died, en he tuck en toted her way out dah in de prairie en buried her. Well, she had a golden arm—all solid gold, fum de shoulder down. He wuz pow'ful mean—pow'ful; en dat night he couldn't sleep, caze he want dat golden arm so bad.

When it come midnight, he could't stan' it no mo'; so he git up, he did, en tuck his lantern en shoved out thoo de storm en dug her up en got de golden arm; en he bent his head down 'gin de win', en

plowed en plowed en plowed thoo de snow. Den all on a sudden he stop en say: "My lan', what's dat!"

En he listen—en listen—en de win' say: "Bzzz-z-zzz" —en den, way back yonder whah de grave is, he hear a voice—he hear a voice all mix' up in de win'—cain't hardly tell 'em' apart—Bzzz—zzz- W-h-o—g-o-t—m-y—g-o-l-d-e-n—arm? — zzz — zzz —-- w-h-o g-o-t m-y g-o-l-d-e-n—arm?

En he begin to shiver and shake, en say, "oh, my! Oh, my lan!" en den de win' blow de lantern out, en de snow en sleet blow in his face en mos' choke him, en he start a-plowin' knee-deep towards home mos' dead, he so sk'yerd—en pooty soon he hear de voice agin, en it 'us comin' after him! "Bzzz—W-h-o—g-o-t—m-y—g-o-l-d-e-n—arm?"

(from a *NEGRO GHOST STORY* by Mark Twain)

These literary extracts show how greatly language can vary even in the same literary genre—fiction. Thomas Hardy introduces Egdon Heath in very formal and somewhat elaborate language to produce a gloomy somber atmosphere, and J. D. Salinger resorts to students' catch phrases to individualize his young protagonist Holden Caulfield—a sort of social rebel while Mark Twain uses Black Vernacular English (BVE) to lend verisimilitude to his *Negro Ghost Story*".

1.1 *Theoretical aspects of language variation*

Language, according to Halliday, is essentially a social activity. And as such, it is subjected to infinite varieties. People use language, talking or writing to each other at different times, in different places, for different purposes, in different social and personal contexts, thus producing different varieties of a language. There exist the mutual relations between different human social situations and different varieties of a language.

To understand better the relationship between language variation and situational contexts, it is necessary to mention briefly the London School, a famous modern linguistic school represented by such well-known figures as Firth, Leech and Halliday. Its views on language are clearly expressed in

Language and Situation, a book co-authored by M.J. Gregory and Short Carroll.

The London School holds that there are three crucial aspects of a language event—the **substantial**, the **formal** and the **situational**.

Language is transmitted by means of either audible sound waves (spoken) or visible marks on a surface (written). This is the **substance** of a language event.

A language event has internal meaningful patterns in sound, vocabulary and grammar. This internal meaningful structure is known as **form**. The change of form, as is shown in the following example, will bring about a change in the meaning:

He's gone to Beijing. (He's not here now.)

Has she been to Beijing? (Did she ever visit Beijing?)

Language events do not occur in isolation from other aspects of human behavior. They take place in **situations**, which can be defined as the relevant extra-textual circumstances, linguistic and non-linguistic, of the language event in question. This is the third aspect of a language event. There is a strong and constant relationship between the language we use in a particular situation and certain features of that situation. So when we receive a letter from the utilities company, open a novel by Faulkner, go to hear a sermon or a political speech, or read an editorial of *The New York Times* or *The Newsweek*, we have an idea of what we are going to get, and most times we more or less get what we expect. This predictability shows that there is a match between language and situational context. In other words, language varies in different situational contexts.

Based on the three essential aspects of the language event, the following definition can be made: **a language variety is a sub-set of formal and/or substantial features which correlate regularly with a particular type of situational context.**

M. A. Halliday classifies situational context into three broad categories:

(1) Field of discourse

This mainly encompasses two situational factors — *the setting* and *the subject matter*.

(2) Tenor of discourse

It expresses the social roles, statuses and personal attitudes of the participants in a language event — *personal tenor*, or what the language user is trying to do in a language event (to inform, direct, persuade, etc.) — *functional tenor*.

(3) Mode of discourse

It is primarily related to the medium of transmission — *spoken*, or *written*, and the complex sub-varieties derived from the two.

Every society requires its members to use different varieties of language in different situations. This kind of appropriateness is reinforced by various social pressures: People using inappropriate language may be laughed at or even scorned by others.

1.2 *Classification of varieties of English*

According to the London School, a language variety is a set of formal and / or substantial features that correlates regularly with a particular type of socio-situational features. They classify varieties of language into two major types: ① varieties according to user — *dialectal varieties*, and ② varieties according to use — *diatypic varieties* (also *registers*). But this classification is a little bit too general and comprehensive to be used in this book. For practical purposes, it is suggested here that varieties of English be classified into five major types:

1. User-related varieties

They refer to the varieties of English used by different users in different places, with different social and cultural backgrounds and during different periods in history, e.g. *British English*, *American English*, *Australian English*, etc.; *Cockney*, *Black English*, etc.; *Old English*, *Middle English*, *Modern English*, *Contemporary English*; etc.

2. Medium-related varieties

They refer to the varieties of English brought about by different means of transmission, e. g. , *written English* , *spoken English* , *English written to be spoken* , etc.

3. Attitude-related varieties

They refer to the varieties of English that carry different tones, denoting the participants' social status and attitudes, e. g. , *formal English* , *informal English* , etc.

4. Function-related varieties

They refer to the varieties of English used to perform various practical functions, e. g. , *technical English* , *legal English* , *advertising English* , etc.

5. Literature-related varieties

They refer to the varieties of English produced in literary creation, i. e. , *varieties according to literary genres* , such as *poetry* , *fiction* , *drama* .

Each variety can be further classified into sub-varieties, sub-sub-varieties and so on. **User-related varieties**, for instance, can be further classified into dialectal varieties and **standard varieties**, and **dialectal varieties** can be further divided into **regional (geographical) dialect**, **social dialect**, **individual dialect** — **idiolect** and **temporal dialect**. All these varieties will be dealt with in the next chapters.

These varieties, of course, have much more in common than what differentiates them. They are all clearly varieties of one language—the English **common core**; they share the same basic vocabulary, basic grammar, common pronunciation, intonation and spelling etc. If they do not have these things in common, they cannot be called “English”. But at the same time, each variety is definitely distinct from all the others.

Chapter 2

USER-RELATED VARIETIES



2.1 Dialects and Standard English

Dialects are defined as varieties of a language spoken in a particular geographical area, by a particular social group or a particular person, during different periods in history, distinguished by its distinct phonological, lexical and grammatical features. By this definition, dialects fall into four sub-types: **regional (geographical) dialect**, **social dialect**, **individual dialect** — **idiolect**, and **temporal dialect**.

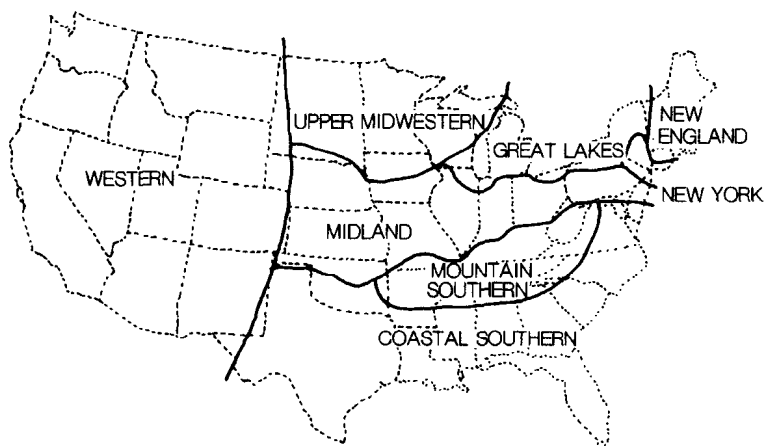
2.1.1 Regional (geographical) dialect

It is a variety of English spoken in a particular geographical area. The English language is an umbrella term covering different varieties of English in use in the United Kingdom, in the United

States, in Australia, in New Zealand and elsewhere. They are in a larger sense all regional dialects of the English language, and each of them has many sub-varieties of its own. Take British English and American English for an example:

Regional dialects	Sub-regional dialects
British English	Yorkshire dialect, Lancashire dialect, Cornish dialect, Cockney, etc.
American English	New England dialect, New York dialect, Upper Midwestern dialect, Midland dialect, Southern dialect, etc.

In the United States, its major regional dialect groups are shown in the following dialectal map of the mainland United States:



Sources: Kurath 1949, Thomas 1958, Kurath & McDavid 1961 Cassidy 1985, Labow 1997.

Traditionally, dialectologists have listed three dialect groups in the United States: Northern, Midland, and Southern—although some scholars prefer a two-way classification of simply Northern and Southern, and one may also find significant difference on the boundaries of each area. Based on the map shown above, some basic observations on current *American geographical dialects* can be made.

A. *The New England Dialects*

These dialects are non-rhotic, dropping [r] before consonants and at the end of words. This area is further subdivided into Eastern New England, including Boston and much of Maine, where O and AU shift into an intermediate vowel so that *cot* and *caught* are merged; and Western New England which retains R-dropping, but does not merge O and AU.

B. *The New York Dialects*

Like the New England Dialects, they are R-dropping. The Hudson Valley dialect of Albany, though R-preserving, is nevertheless close enough to New York City's to be grouped with it.

C. *The Great Lakes Dialects*

Among all the dialect regions, the Great Lakes region is perhaps the most homogenous, since the major cities in this area (Syracuse, Rochester, Buffalo, Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, Milwaukee) are simultaneously undergoing a chain shift known as the Northern Cities Shift, with a rotation of the short vowels so that "they may be heard as members of another phoneme by listeners from another dialect area with consequent confusion of meanings: *Ann* as *Ian*, *bit* as *bet*, *bet* as *bat* or *but*, *lunch* as *launch*, *talk* as *tuck*, *locks* as *lax*" (Labov 1991). This area is fully R-preserving.

D. *The Upper Midwest Dialects*

This area is characterized mainly by a conservative vowel scheme, where the long vowels (often attributed to Scandinavian influence) have remained purely monophthongal, exemplified in the widely known long O in the name Minnesota. Along the northern border are found Canadianisms such as the centralized long I in *fuyr* (fire) and the centralized ow "uh-oo" in : *ouwt* (out).

E. *The Midland Dialects*

Midland dialects retain R in all positions, and long I is not flattened (monophthongized) as uniformly as in the South, but the Midland is other-

wise not very easy to describe as a whole, since “each of the Midland cities — Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Columbus, Cincinnati, Indianapolis, St. Louis, Kansas City — has its own local character.” (Labov 1997). More southerly Midland cities have a typically Southern fronted nucleus in *ow*, e.g. *aout* (out); more northerly Midland cities tend not to (Labov 1997) on this basis divides the area horizontally into a North Midland and South Midland. Previous researchers have also seen east-west distinctions, separating the Pennsylvania dialect(s) from those of the Lower Midwest. (Kurath 1949, Thomas 1958, Carver 1989).

F. *The Western Dialects*

Western phonology has only recently begun to diverge, primarily with the merger of *AU* into the short *O* class: e.g. *cot* for both *caught* and *cot*, and the fronting of the long *U* class, e.g. “ih-oo” in words such as *two*. Otherwise it appears that the Western dialects were formed primarily from a Midland base, since both groups are similarly conservative in their phonology — in fact it was certainly Midland and Western dialects which were so often lumped together under the catch-all phrase “General American”. Westward migration has also carried typically Northern features into the Pacific Northwest, and Southern features into the Southwest: both phonology (Labov 1997) and lexicon (Carver 1989) have been affected.

G. *The Mountain Southern Dialect*

The Mountain Southern Dialect is a sort of Scottish-flavored Elizabethan English and is directly related to migration pattern. Isolated in the mountainous areas, the settlers and their descendants have kept the old speech forms that fell out of fashion elsewhere. For example, instead of saying *The car needs washing*, they say *The car needs washed*. One major point of pronunciation with locals is not to pronounce words that end in “er” or “ing” as spelled. Examples: *trailer* = *trailuh* (or “traila”), *border* = *borduh*, *driver* = *drivuh*, etc. The “ing” words are always pronounced without the “g”. Examples: *swimming* = *swimmin*, *looking* = *lookin*, *walking* = *walkin*, etc. The dialect is non-rhotic. Other dialectal features include:

(1) Merger of [ɔ] and [ɔ:]: *Don* ~ *Dawn*, *cot* ~ *caught*, *sock* ~ *talk*, *collar* ~ *taller*.

- (2) Merger of [i] and [e] before nasals: *pin* ~ *pen*.
- (3) Merger before tautosyllabic [l]: *fill* ~ *heel*, *fell* ~ *fail*, *full* ~ *fool*.
- (4) Merger before tautosyllabic [r]: *horse* ~ *hoarse*, *card* ~ *cord*.
- (5) Merger before intervocalic [r]: *Mary* ~ *merry*, *merry* ~ *marry*.
- (6) Merger of [w] and [hw]: *wail* ~ *whale*.

H. The Coastal Southern Dialect

Roughly speaking, the Coastal Southern Dialect shows the following features: ① Coastal Southern is non-rhotic; ② The same tendency for diphthongs to become monophthongs is a related feature, so that *hide* is a near rhyme of both *hod* and non-rhotic *hard*. ③ Some word-internal consonant clusters can be captured by such spellings as *bidness* (business) and *Babtist* (Baptist). ④ Merger of vowels in *pin* and *pen*, *since* and *cents* (to the vowel of the first in each pair) is a feature that is spreading elsewhere.

But for some practical purposes, when we discuss regional dialects in this book, we actually refer to the sub-regional dialects in a country where English is the mother tongue. British English, American English, etc. come under the heading of standard British English, standard American English, etc., and are treated as such except in a few cases of comparison.

One of the most prominent phonological traits of regional dialects is **accent**. There are, of course, dialectal features at the lexical and grammatical/syntactic levels. We notice immediately these features in listening to whoever speaks a dialect that is different from our own. The distinctions between regional varieties normally reflect physical space between speakers and between communities. It is this space that prevents social interaction and permits the development of distinct linguistic features. The variation may be slight as one passes from one village to the next because physical space relationships can themselves frequently be seen as comprising a continuum. But it can also be quite dramatic if one passes into a dialect enclave or crosses over a dialect boundary. In the following sub-sections, just a few samples of dialectal features will be given to illustrate regional variations of the English language.

2.1.1.1 *Dialectal features at the phonological/graphetic level*

- (1) Variation in the pronunciation of certain sounds:

[θ] → [f] thing → fin
[ŋ] → [n] working → workin'

- (2) Dropped initial [h] in:

He, him, his, history, hotel, etc. → (written as) 'e, 'im, 'is, 'istory, 'otel, etc.

- (3) Dropped initial vowel [ə] and the last consonant [d] or [t] in the pronunciation of some words:

and → 'n'
look at → look a'

2.1.1.2 *Dialectal features at the lexical level*

1. Different words may mean the same thing in different regions

Take for example the various terms used to name the building where cows are kept: *byre* (in south Scotland, parts of Ireland and northern England), *shippon* (in north-west England), *mistall* (in west Yorkshire), *neat-house* (in north Suffolk and south Norfolk), *cow-pen* (in the west of Warwickshire), *cow-house* or *cow-shed* (elsewhere and spreading).

2. The same word may mean different things in different regions

Dinner means the evening meal to some, but the mid-day meal to others; a *bucket* in parts of Scotland is really a dustbin, whereas in England a bucket is a vessel for carrying, for example, water or milk; a *backward* child in Northern Ireland is merely shy, but elsewhere he is retarded; a *chapel* in southern Scotland is a place of worship for Catholics, but in England usually for Methodists; a *crumpet* in Scotland is a round, flat, sweetened cake, but a round, flat, unsweetened cake in England. The list of such differences is potentially very large indeed,² but the above examples suffice to show that regional differences of vocabulary are truly great. They are natural and to be expected. No human language could, and no human language does, exist