



REGISTERING REGISTER

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REGISTER ISN'T ONLY FOR SPEECH

- Linguists talk about “register” with regard to speech.
 - Patterns
 - Word choices
 - Expectations of listeners
- I talk about “register” with regard to writing.
 - Patterns
 - Word choices
 - Expectations of readers



THE FIVE REGISTERS

Frozen

Formal

Consultative

Casual

Intimate

SPEECH REGISTERS

Frozen: pledges, oaths, ceremonial speeches

Formal: speeches, much of academia/research

Consultative: professional-to-client (doctor, attorney, teacher), with an assumption of mutual respect

Casual: peer-to-peer, whether in a business setting or an informal one with those who are not family

Intimate: family and closest friends, often using “in jokes” and special phrases/words with meaning only for those “in the know”

FROZEN REGISTER

Fashion: full
evening dress
(white tie)

Food:
traditional
Japanese
kaiseki

Writing:
religious
(liturgical)

FORMAL REGISTER

Fashion: black tie (cravate noire)

Food: prix fixe, tasting menu

Writing: academic, legal, medical

CONSULTATIVE REGISTER

Fashion: business
suit/uniform

Food: a step
above restaurant
franchise

Writing: marketing
material/educatio
nal texts

CASUAL REGISTER

Fashion: T-shirt
and jeans

Food: the corner
diner or buffet

Writing: business
emails (peer to
peer)

INTIMATE REGISTER

Fashion:
underwear,
lingerie

Food: home
cooking

Writing: personal
letters, emails,
texts

REGISTER IN FICTION

- Register is not the same as authorial voice, but it is a part of it.
- Dialogue can take on nearly any register, depending on who is speaking.
- The narrative voice will be the main register of the work; dialogue is secondary.
- Consider the register and voice of a classic like *Brideshead Revisited* compared to that of *The Old Man and the Sea*.

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