

Notions abordées : L'idée de progrès & Espaces et échanges

An interview with Joan Houston Hall by Shelly De Vito

American Voices

Slang vs Regionalisms

Shelly: DARE is the acronym for the Dictionary of Regional English. We have a special guest today, Joan Houston Hall, Chief Editor of DARE. What is the difference between slang and regionalism?

Joan: Slang tends to be ephemeral. Slang is the kind of language we use when we want to show that we are identifying with a particular group. So, if you think about high-school students and the slang that they use among themselves, you recognize that they feel pretty cool when they use it, and their parents don't understand it, but as soon as their ten year-old brothers start using it, all of a sudden, they change it because it doesn't identify them as being part of the "in" group if younger kids know it. So, slang is very ephemeral and it would be very difficult to include that in our dictionary. There are wonderful dictionaries of slang, some of them historical dictionaries, but we're interested in the kinds of words and phrases that can be shown to vary from region to region, whether that region is very small, as in a city, or part of a city, or very large, meaning most of the country but not all of the country.

Shelly: You can learn your American slang with DARE: fifty years in the making!