Sociolinguistics: An Introduction in brief

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What do sociolinguists study?

Example 1:

Randy : I'm coming! (as he always greets his mother soon after school)
Mother: Hi honey, you're late
Randy : Yeah sorry mum that stingy old man kept us in again.
Mother: Grandma is here.
Randy : Ups sorry. Where is she?

Randy's description of his teacher would have been expressed differently if he had realized his grandmother could hear what he was saying. The way people talk is influenced by the social context in which they are talking. it matters who can hear us and where we are talking, as well as how we are feeling. The same message may be expressed very differently to different people. We use different in different styles in different social contexts. Leaving school Randy had run into the school principal.

Example 2:

Randy : Good afternoon, sir.
Principal : what are you doing at this moment? Why you are still here?
Randy : Yes sir, Mr. Norman kept us in.

The response reflects Randy's awareness of the social factors which influence the choice of appropriate ways of speaking in different social contexts. *Sociolinguistics* is concerned with the relationship between language and the context in which it is used.

The conversation between Randy and his mother also illustrates the fact that language serves a range of functions. We use language to ask for and give people information. We use it to express indignation and annoyance, as well as admiration and respect. Often one utterance will simultaneously convey both information and express feeling. Randy's utterance. "Yeah sorry mum that stingy old man kept us in again" This not only tells his mother why he is late, his choice of words also tells her how he feels about the teacher concerned, and tells us something about his relationship with his grandmother and the principal (to whom he uses *sir*). The relationship with his mother is an intimate and friendly one, rather than a formal, distant or respectful one.

We also indicate aspects to our social identity through the way we talk. Our speech provides clues to others about who we are, where we come from, and perhaps what kind of social experiences we have had. Written transcripts provide no auditory clues to readers, and examples 1 and 2 are also too short to provide reliable clues to speaker gender or ethnicity, but we can deduce Randy's age reasonably accurately from his linguistic choices (he is in his early teens) as well as make a reasonable guess about his social background.

Why do we say the same thing in different ways?

Example 3

Every afternoon my friend packs her bag and leaves her Cardiff office at about 5 o'clock. As she leaves, her business partner says *goodbye Margaret,* (she replies *goodbye Mike*) her secretary says *goodbye Mrs. Walker,* (she replies *goodbyes Jill*) and the caretaker says *Bye Mrs. Walker* (to which she responds *goodbye Andy*). As she arrives home she is greeted by *Hi mum* from her daughter, Jenny, *hello dear, have a great day?,* from her mother, and and simply *you're late again!* from her husband. Later, in the evening the president of the local flower club calss to ask if she would like to join. *Good evening is that Mrs. Billington?* She asks. *No, it's Ms Walker, but my husband's name is David Billington,* she answers. *What can I do for you?* Finally a friend calls *Hello Meg, sut wyt ti?*

Languages provide a variety of ways of saying the same thing—addressing and greeting others, describing things and greeting others, describing things, paying compliment. As in examples 1 and 2, the final choice reflects factors such as the relationship between the people in the particular situation, and how the speaker feels about the person addressed. In example 3, her mother's choice of *dear* reflects her affectionate feelings towards Margaret. If she had been annoyed with her daughter, she would have used her full name *Margaret.* Her friend's use of *sut wyt ti?* (how are you?) as a greeting reflects her Welsh ethnicity. The choice of one linguistic form rather than another is a useful clue to non-linguistic. Linguistic variation can provide social information.

Example 4:

(a) Refuse should be deposited in the receptacle provided
(b) Put your rubbish in the bin, Jill
(c) Please tender exact fare and state destination
(d) Give me the right money and tell me where you're going.

Those sentences above give the example to language variation in grammar and vocabulary. The first, (a) uses a passive grammatical structure *should be deposited,* for example, which avoids any mention of people involved. By contrast (b) uses an imperative verb form, *put,* and an address form, *Jill.* This utterance is much more direct and it

specifies whose rubbish is the focus of the directive. *Refuse, deposited* and *receptacle* are all more formal and less frequent words than *rubbish, put,* and *bin.* Both sentences express the same message or speech function; they give a directive. But they are not paper on the floor, it is likely you would find it odd. You might assume she was being sarcastic or humorous, but you would not be likely to consider it a normal way of speaking to someone she knew well.

Some social factors are attributes of the speaker — for example, age, gender, socio-economic class, ethnicity and educational level. Many studies have shown that these factors commonly correlate both with variation within the language itself (such as the pronunciation of final consonant clusters) and with variation in the use of language (such as the use of more or less formal vocabulary, depending on the audience). These findings match our everyday experience; most people are well aware that men and women use the language differently, that poor people often speak differently from rich people, and that educated people use language differently from uneducated people.

People adjust the way they talk to their social situation. It is common knowledge that people also adjust the way they talk to their social situation. Socio-situational variation, sometimes called register, depends on the subject matter, the occasion and the relationship between participants — in addition to the previously mentioned attributes of region, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, age and gender. Here are some examples below:

- Constraints on subject matter vary from culture to culture. In American English, it is fine to ask a child or a medical patient, "Have you had a bowel movement today?" However, the same question to an acquaintance might be coarse. Even a good friend would find it at the least peculiar. American English speakers must approach other subjects with care. They wouldn't dare ask, for example, "Are you too fat for one plane seat?" "What's your take-home pay?" "Are you sure you're only 50?" "Do you have a personal relationship with Christ?"
- Any of these questions posed at a cocktail party might draw a prompt "None of your business" — or something less polite. However, in other situations, between other participants, those same questions might be appropriate. A public-health official encouraging Americans to lose weight might well ask a general audience, "Are you too fat to fit in one plane seat?" A financial planner speaking to a client certainly should ask, "What is your take-home pay?"

Contact

Contact is an important concept in sociolinguistics — social contact and language contact. Language change spreads through networks of people who talk with one another. Tight-knit groups that keep to themselves tend not to promote change. Networks whose members also belong to other networks tend to promote change. People can live next door to one another and not participate in the same network. In the segregated South, blacks and whites often lived on the same piece of land; blacks worked in the homes of whites. The physical distance was minimal, but the great social distance led to different varieties of American English. Robert Macneil talking with woman, nyc.

Contact between languages brings about variation and change. Situations of language contact are usually socially complex, making them of interest to sociolinguists. When speakers of different languages come together, the results are determined in large part by the economic and political power of the speakers of each language. In the United States, English became the popular language from coast to coast, largely replacing colonial French and Spanish and the languages of Native Americans. In the Caribbean and perhaps in British North America where slavery was practiced, Africans learned the English of their masters as best they could, creating a language for immediate and limited communication called a pidgin. When Africans forgot or were forbidden to use their African languages to communicate with one another, they developed their English pidgin into their native tongue. A language that develops from a pidgin into a native language is called a creole. African American Vernacular English may have developed this way.

Bilingualism is another response to language contact. In the United States, large numbers of non-English speaking immigrants arrived in the late 19th and early 20th century. Typically, their children were bilingual and their grandchildren were monolingual speakers of English. When the two languages are not kept separate in function, speakers can intersperse phrases from one into the other, which is called code switching. Speakers may also develop a dialect of one language that is heavily influenced by features of the other language, such as the contemporary American dialect Chicano English.

Sociolinguists: Subjects and Leaders

Sociolinguists study many other issues, among them the values that hearers place on variations in language, the regulation of linguistic behavior, language standardization, and educational and governmental policies concerning language.

The term sociolinguistics is associated with William Labov and his quantitative methodology. Around the world, many linguists study the intersection of language and social factors from other perspectives. The most prominent is M. A. K. Halliday, whose approach is called systemic-functionalist linguistics. Some other prominent sociolinguists are Guy Bailey, John Baugh, Jack Chambers, Penelope Eckert, Lesley Milroy, John Rickford, Suzanne Romaine, Roger Shuy, Deborah Tannen, Peter Trudgill, and Walt Wolfram.

Language choice in multilingual communities

In multilingual communities, more than one language is used. It means that people living in this situation may speak more than one language. Thus, they can have linguistic repertoire. When interacting with others, they can choose a code or a variety which is appropriate with participants, topic and location. These factors are known as domains of language use. These complexities of language choice form unique sociolinguistic situations. A speech community use two varieties (H variety and L variety) to cover all communities domains. This is called diglossia. Whereas poliglossia is described as situations where more than two distinct codes or varieties are used for distinguishable situations.

Language choice is also determined by social distance, status, formality and function. The process of switching back and forth between one language or dialect and another within the same conversation is called code switching. It is a conversational strategy used to establish, cross, or break group boundaries; to create, evoke, or change interpersonal reaction. Situational code switching happens because of the situation changes while metaphorical code switching happens because of the topic changes.

Language maintenance and Shift

The degree to which an individual or group continues to use their language, particularly in a BILINGUAL or MULTILINGUAL are or among immigrant groups. Many factors affect language maintenance, for example:

a. Whether or not the language is an official language
b. Whether or not it is used in the media, for religious purposes, in education
c. How many speakers of the language live in the same area? In some places where the use of certain languages has greatly decreased there have been attempts at revival, e.g. of Welsh in Wales and Gaelic in parts of Scotland

Shift can be considered a change (shift) from the use of language to the use of another language. This often occurs when people migrate to another country where the main language is different, as in the case of immigrants to the USA and Australia from non-English-speaking countries. Language shift may be actively encouraged by official government policy, for example by restricting the number of languages used as media of instruction. It may also occur because another language, usually the main language of the region, is needed for employment opportunities and wider communication. Language shift should not be confused with LANGUAGE CHANGE.

Linguistic Varieties and Multilingual nation

Language variation (linguistic varieties) could be another term of speech variety, is a also a term used instead LANGUAGE, DIALECT, SOCIOLECT, PIDGIN, CREOLE, etc, because it is considered more neutral than such terms. It may also be used for different varieties of one language, e.g. American English, Australian English, Indian English, etc. As a result this could lead to different pronunciation, grammar, or word choice within a language. Variation in a language may be related to region, to social class and/or educational background or the degree of formality of a situation in which language is used.

Dialect a variety of a language, spoken in one part of a country (regional dialect), or by people belonging to a particular social class (social dialect or SOCIOLECT), which is different in some words, grammar, and/or pronunciation from other forms of the same language. A dialect is often associated with a particular ACCENT. Sometimes a dialect gains status and becomes the STANDARD VARIETY of a country.

What is dialect?

Sociolinguists also study dialect — any regional, social or ethnic variety of a language. By that definition, the English taught in school as correct and used in non-personal writing is only one dialect of contemporary American English. Usually called Standard American English or Edited American English

Pidgin and Creole

A language which develops as a contact language when a group of people who speak different language try to communicate with one another on a regular basis. For example, this might occur where foreign traders have to communicate with the local population or groups of workers from different language backgrounds on plantations or in factories. A pidgin usually has a limited vocabulary and a reduced grammatical structure which may expand when a pidgin is used over long period and for many purposes. For example, Tok Pisin (New Guinea Pidgin)

Yu	*ken*	*kisim*	*long*	*olgeta*	*bik*	*pela*	*stua*
You	can	get (it)	at	all	big	(noun marker)	stores

Usually pidgins have no native speakers but there are expanded pidgins, e.g. Tok Pisin in Papua New Guinea and Nigerian pidgin English in West Africa, which are spoken by some people in their community as first or primary language. Often expanded pidgins will develop into Creole languages. Research has shown that there are some similarities between the structures of pidgin and creole languages and the interlanguages of second language learners.

National Languages and language planning

These terms above could be best described into two definitions. First is a national language is a language which is usually considered to be the main language of a nation. A government may declare a particular language or dialect to be the national language of a nation, e.g. Bahasa Malaysia (standard Malay) in Malaysia and Pilipino in

Philippines. Usually, the national language is also the official language; that is the language used in government and courts of law, and for official business.

However, in multilingual nations, there may be more than one official language, and in such cases the term "official language" is often used rather than "national language". For example, the Republic of Singapore has four official languages; English, Chinese (Mandarin), Malay, and Tamil.

Language planning is usually by a government or government agency, concerning choice of national or official language(s), ways of spreading the use of a language, spelling reforms, the addition of new words to the language, and other language issue. Through language planning, an official language policy is established and/or implemented. For example in Indonesia, Malay was chosen as the national language and was given the name Bahasa Indonesia. It became the main language of education. There were several spelling reforms and a national planning agency was established to deal with problems such as the development of scientific terms.

Language is basic to social interactions, affecting them and being affected by them. Connie Eble of the University of North Carolina explains how the field of sociolinguistics analyzes the many ways in which language and society intersect.

Sociolinguistics is the study of how language serves and is shaped by the social nature of human beings. In its broadest conception, sociolinguistics analyzes the many and diverse ways in which language and society entwine. This vast field of inquiry requires and combines insights from a number of disciplines, including linguistics, sociology, psychology and anthropology.

Sociolinguistics examines the interplay of language and society, with language as the starting point. Variation is the key concept, applied to language itself and to its use. The basic premise of sociolinguistics is that language is variable and changing. As a result, language is not homogeneous — not for the individual user and not within or among groups of speakers who use the same language.

By studying written records, sociolinguists also examine how language and society have interacted in the past. For example, they have tabulated the frequency of the singular pronoun thou and its replacement you in dated hand-written or printed documents and correlated changes in frequency with changes in class structure in 16th and 17th century England. This is historical sociolinguistics: the study of relationship between changes in society and changes in language over a period of time.

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