# Sociolinguistics: Language choice, Diglossia, Polyglossia, Language maintenance and shift, Linguistic varieties, Regional, Social dialects, Gender and age, and Language change.

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## Language choice in multilingual communities (Choosing your variety or code)

**What is your linguistic repertoire?**

Example 1:

> Kalala is 16 years old. He lives in Bukavu, an African city in eastern Zaire with a population about 220.000. it is a multicultural, multilingual city with more people coming and going for work and business reasons than people who live there predominantly. Over forty groups speaking different languages can be found in the city. Kalala, like many of his friends, is unemployed. He spends his days roaming the street, stopping offs periodically at regular meeting places in the market place, in the park, or at a friend's place. During a normal day he uses at least three different varieties or codes, and sometimes more.

Kalala speaks an informal style of Shi, his tribal language, at home with his family, and he is familiar with formal Shi used for weddings and funerals. He uses informal Shi in the market-place when he deals with vendors from his own ethnic group. When he wants to communicate with people from different tribal group, he uses lingua franca of the area, Swahili. He learned standard Zairean Swahili at school but the local market-place variety is a little different. It has its won distinct linguistic features, and even its own name—Kingwana. He uses Kingwana to younger children and to adults he meets in the street, as well as people in the market-place.

Standard Zairean Swahili. One of the national languages, is the language used in Bukavu for most official transactions, despite the fact that French is the official language of Zaire. Kalala uses standard Zairean Shawili with official government when he has to fill in a form or pay a bill. He uses it when he tries for a job in a shop or in an offices, but there are very few jobs around. He spends most of his time with his friends, and with them he uses a special variety or called Indoubil. This is a variety which is used among the young people in Bukavu, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds or tribal affiliations. It is used like- group slang between young people in monolingual variety or code in Zaire by drawing on languages like French, English, and Italian—all languages whin can be read or in the multilingual city of Bukavu.

If we list the varieties or codes he uses regularly, we find that Kalala's linguistic repertoire includes three varieties of Swahili (standard Zairean, local Swahili or Kingwana, and Indoubil) and two varieties of his tribal language, Shi (informal and formal or casual style). The factors that lead Kalala to choose one rather than another are the kinds of social factors identified as relevant to language choice in speech communities throughout the world. Characteristics of theusers or participants are relevant. Kalala' own linguistic repertoire and the repertoire of the person he is talking to are basic limiting factors, for instance.

**Domains of language use**

Example 2:

> Anahina is a bilingual Tongan New Zealander living in Auckland. At home with her family she uses Tongan almost exclusively for a wide range of topics. She often talks to her grandmother about Tongan customs, for instance. With her mother she exchanges gossip about Tongan friends and relatives. Tongan is the language the family uses at mealtimes. They discuss what they have been doing, plan family outings and share information about Tongan social events. It is only with her older sisters that she uses some English words when they are talking about school or doing their homework.

Certain social factors—who you are talking to, the social context of the talk, the function and topic of the discussion—turn out to be important in accounting for language choice in many different kinds of speech community. It has proved very useful, particularly when describing code choice in large speech communities, to look at 'typical' interactions which involve these factors. We can imagine, for instance, a 'typical' family interaction. It would be located in the setting of the home; the typical participants will obviously be family members; and typical topics would be family activities. 'Anahina's family's meal-time conversations described in the example 2, illustrate this pattern well. A number of such typical interactions have been identified as relevant in describing patterns of code choice in many speech communities. They are known as domains of language use, a term popularized by an American sociolinguist, Joshua Fishman. A domain involves typical interactions between typical participants in typical settings.

Example 3:

> Maria is a teenager whose Portuguese parents came to London 1960s. she uses mainly Portuguese at home and to older people at the Portuguese Catholic church and community centre, but English is the appropriate variety or code for her to use at school. She uses mostly English at her after-school job serving in a local café, though occasionally older customers greet her in Portuguese.

Domain is clearly a very general concept which draws on three important social factors in code choice—participants, setting and topic. It is useful for capturing broad generalizations about any speech community. Using information about the domains of use in a community it is possible to draw a very simple model summarizing the norms of language use for the community. This is often particularly useful for bilingual and multilingual speech communities.

The information provided in example 3, for instance, identifies four domains and describes the variety or code appropriate to each.

Table 2.1:

| **Domain** | **Variety or code** |
|---|---|
| Home/ family | Portuguese |
| Church/ religion | Portuguese |
| Work/ employment | English |
| School/ education | English |

While it obviously oversimplifies the complexity of bilingual interaction, nevertheless a model like this is useful in a number of ways. First, it forces us to be very clear about which domains and varieties are relevant to language choice. The model summarizes what we know about the patterns of language use in community. It is not an account of the choices a person must make or of the process they go through in selecting a code. It is simply a description of the community's norms which can be altered or added to if we discover more information. It would be possible, for instance, to add other domains after 'school', for instance, such as 'the pub' or 'the law court'.

A second reason why an explicit model is useful is that it provides a clear basis for comparing pattern of code choice in different speech communities. Models make it easy to compare the varieties appropriate in similar domains in different speech communities. And a model is also useful to a newcomer in a community as a summary of the appropriate patterns of code use in the community. A model describes which code or codes are usually selected for use in different situations.

## Diglossia

### A linguistic division of labour

Example 4:

> In Eggenwil, a town in the Aargau canton of Switzerland, Silvia, a bank-teller, knows two very distinct varieties of German. One is the local Swiss German dialect of her canton which she uses in her everyday interactions. The other is standard German which she learnt at school, and though she understands it very well indeed, she rarely uses it in speech. Newspapers are written in standard German, and when she occasionally goes to hear a lecture at the university it may be in standard German. The sermons her mother listens to in church are generally in standard German too, though more radical clerics use Swiss German dialect. The novels Silvia reads also use standard German.

The pattern of code or variety choice in Eggenwil is one which has been described with the term diglossia. This term has been used in both in a narrow sense and in a much broader sense. In the narrow and original sense of the term, diglossia has three crucial features:

1. Two distinct varieties of the same language are used in the community with one regarded as a high (or H) variety and the other a low (or L) variety.
2. Each variety is used for quite for quite distinct functions; H and L complement each other.
3. No one uses the H variety in everyday conversation.

The situation in Eggenwil fits these three criteria for narrow or 'classic' diglossia perfectly. There are a number of other communities which fit this narrow definition too. Arabic-speaking countries use classical Arabic as their H variety Katharevousa, alongside an L variety. Dhimotiki, which is steadily displacing it. In medieval Europe, Latin was the H variety alongside daughter languages, such as Italian, French and Spanish, which had developed from its more colloquial form. These communities all satisfy the three criteria.

In these communities while the two varieties are (or were) linguistically related, the relationship is closer in some cases than others. The degree of difference in the pronunciation of H and L varies from place to place, for example. The sound of Swiss German are quite different from those standard German, while Greek Katharevousa is much closer to Dhimotiki in its pronunciation. The grammar of the two linguistically related varieties differs too.

Often the grammar of H is morphologically more complicated. So standard German, for instance, uses more case markers on nouns and tense inflections on verbs than Swiss German; and standard French, the H variety in Haiti, uses more markers of number and gender on nouns than Haitian Creole, the L variety.

Most of the vocabulary of H and L is the same. But, not surprisingly since it is used in more formal domains, the H vocabulary includes many more formal and technical terms such as conservation and psychometric, while the L variety has words for everyday objects such as saucepan and shoe. There are also some interesting paired items for frequently referred to concepts: where standard German uses *Kartoffel* for 'potato', and *Dachboden* for 'attic', Swiss German use *Hardopfel* and *Estrich*. Where Katharevousa uses *ikias* for 'house', Dhimotiki uses spiti.

Example 5:

> Oi Lin Tan, a 20-year-old Chinese Singaporean, uses three languages regularly. At home she uses Cantonese to her mother and to her grandfather who lives with them. With her friends she generally uses Singapore English. She learned to understand Hokkien, another Chinese language, in the smaller shops and market-place but in large department stores she again uses Singapore English. At primary school she was taught for just over half the time in Mandarin Chinese, and so she often watches Channel 8, the Mandarin television station, and she regularly reads a Chinese newspaper Lianhe Zaobao, which is written in Mandarin Chinese. During the other part of the time at primary school she was taught in a formal variety of Singapore English. This is the code she uses when she has to deal with government officials, or when she applies for an office job during the university holidays. She went to an English medium secondary school and she is now studying geography and economics at English-medium university. The text books are all in English.

We have some choices in English which give the flavor of these differences. Choosing between words like *perused* and *read*, or *affluent* and *rich*, for instance, or between expression such as *having finally dispatched the missive* and *when I had posted the letter at last* captures the kind of differences involved. But while either would be perfectly possible in written or spoken English, in most diglossia situations the H form would not occur in everyday conversation, and the L form would generally seem odd in writing. No one uses H for everyday interaction. In Arabic-speaking countries, for example, classical Arabic is revered as the language of the Koran. It is taught in school and used for very formal interactions and in writing. But for most everyday conversations in Arabic-speaking countries people use the everyday colloquial variety. A friend of mine went to Morocco having learned classical Arabic at university in England. When he arrived and used his classical variety some people were very impressed. People generally respect and admire those who have mastered classical Arabic. But most of them could not understand what he was saying. His colleagues warned him that he would be laughed at or regarded as sacrilegious (melanggar kesucian) if he went about trying to buy food in classical Arabic. It would be a bit like asking for chops at the butcher's using Shakespearian English.

## Polyglossia

Diglossic situations involve two contrasting varieties, H and L. sometimes; however, a more sophisticated concept is needed to describe the functional distribution of different varieties in a community. People like Kalala in Bukavu, for instance, use many different codes for different purposes. The term polyglossia has been used for situations like this where a community regularly uses more than two languages.

Oi Lin Tan's Cantonese-speaking community in Singapore, in example 5, can similarly be described as polyglossic, but the relationship between the various codes or varieties are not at all straightforward. Table 2.2 represents one way of describing them.

Table 2.2 Poyglossia in Singapore

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| H | Mandarin | Singapore English formal variety |
| L | Cantonese Hokkien | Singapore English informal variety |

Both Mandarin and formal Singapore English can be considered H varieties alongside different L varieties. Mandarin functions as an H variety in relation to at least two L varieties, Hokkien and Cantonese. Informal Singapore English is an L variety alongside the more formal H variety. So for this speech community there are two H varieties and a number of L varieties in a complex relationship.

In the first half of the twentieth century many Maori people in New Zealand were bilingual in English and Maori. However the situation in many townships where Maori people lived could best be described as polyglossic rather than diglossic. Colloquial or everyday Maori was the L variety which they used to talk to friends and family and in many shops. In addition, these communities made use of two H varieties. They used a formal varieties of Maori for ceremonial purposes and for interaction on the marae (formal meeting area). English was the other H varieties. It was the language of the school, the government, the courts and for all official transactions with the

Pakeha (non-Maori New Zealanders). Polyglossia then is a useful term for describing situations where more than two distinct codes or varieties are used for clearly distinct purposes or in clearly distinguishable situations.

## Language maintenance and shift

### Language shift in different communities

Example 6:

> Maniben is a young British Hindu woman who lives in Coventry. Her family moved to Britain from Uganda in 1970, when she was 5 years old. She started work on the shop floor in a bicycle factory when she was 16. At home Maniben speaks Gujerati with her parents and grandparents. Although she had learned English at school, she found she didn't need much at work. Many of the girls working with her also spoke Gujerati, so when it wasn't too noisy they would talk to each other in their home language. Maniben was good at her job and she got promoted to floor supervisor. In that job she needed to use English more of the time, though she could still some Gujerati with her old workmates. She went to evening classes and learned to type. Then, because she was interested, she went on to learn how to operate a word-processor. Now she works in the main office and she uses English all the time at work.

Maniben's pattern of language use at work has gradually shifted over a period of ten years. At one stage she used mainly Gujerati; now she uses almost exclusively. Maniben's experience is typical for those who use a minority language in a predominantly monolingual culture and society. The order of domains in which language shift occurs may differ for different individuals and different groups, but gradually over time the language of the wider society displaces the minority language mother tongue. There are many social factors which can lead a community to shift from using one language for most purposes to using a different language from using distinct codes in different domains, to using different varieties of just one language for their communicative needs. Migrant families provide an obvious example of this process of language shift.

In countries like England, Australia, New Zealand and the United States, one of the first domains in which children of migrant families meet English is the school. They may have watched English TV programmes and heard English used in shops before starting school, but at school they are expected to interact in English. They have to use English because it is the only means of communicating with the teacher and the other children. For many children of migrants, English soon becomes the normal language for talking to other children—including their brothers and sisters. Because her grandparents knew little English, Maniben continued to use mainly Gujerati at home even though she had learned English at school and used it more and more at work. In many families, however, English gradually infiltrates the home through children. Children discuss school and friends in English with each other, and gradually their parents begin to use English to them too, especially if they are working in jobs where they use English.

There is pressure from wider society too. Immigrants who look and sound 'different' are often regarded as threatening by majority group members. There is pressure to conform in all kinds of ways. Language shift to English, for instance, has often been expected of migrants in predominantly monolingual countries such as England, the Unite d States, Australia and New Zealand. Speaking good English has been regarded as a sign of successful assimilation, and it was widely assumed that meant abandoning the minority language. So most migrant families gradually shift from using Gujerati, or Italian, or Vietnamese to each other most of the time, to using English. This may take three or four generations. Typically migrants are virtually monolingual in their mother tongue, their children are bilingual, and their grandchildren are often monolingual in the language of the 'host' country. We can observe the shift by oting the change in people's pattern of language use in different domains over time.

## 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.

Example 7:

> Mr. Patel is a spice merchant who lives in Bombay. When he gets up he talks to his wife and children in Kathiawari, their dialect of Gujerati. Every morning he goes to the local market where he uses Marathi to buy his vegetables. At the railway station he buys his ticket into Bombay city using Hindustani, the

working person's lingua franca. He rads his Gujerati newspaper on the train, and when he gets to work he uses Kacchi, the language of the spice trade, all day. He knows enough English to enjoy an English cricket commentary on the radio, but he would find an English film difficult to follow. However, since the spice business is flourishing, his children go to an English medium school, so he expects them to be more proficient in English than he is.

The fact that India is one of the most multilingual nations in the world is reflected in Mr Patel's linguistic repertoire, just as the linguistic heterogeneity of Zaire was reflected in Kalala's repertoire. With a population of over 700 million, Indians use hundreds of different languages—the exact number depends on what counts as a distinct language, and what is rather a dialect of another language. With this kind of linguistic diversity it is easy to understand the problems facing the country at the national level. Should a country use the same language for internal administration and for official communications with other nations? Which language or languages should be used by the government and the courts? In order to assess the relative claims of different languages it is necessary to look at their status and the functions which they serve. Sociolinguists have developed a number of ways of categorizing languages, according to their status and social functions. The distinction between vernacular language and a standard language is a useful place to start.

**Vernacular languages**

The term vernacular is used in a number of ways. It generally refers to language which has not been standardized and which does not have official status. There are hundreds of vernacular languages, such as Buang in Papua New Guinea, for instance, many of which have never been written down or described. In a multilingual speech community, the many different ethnic or tribal languages used by different groups are referred to vernacular languages. Vernaculars are usually the first languages learned by people in multilingual communities, and they are often used for a relatively narrow range of informal function.

There are three components of the meaning of the term vernacular, then. The mst basic refers to the fact that a vernacular is an uncodified or unstandardised variety. The second refers to the way it is acquired—in the home, as the first variety. The third is the fact that it is used for relatively circumscribed functions. The first component has been most widely used the defining criterion, but emphasis on one or other of the components has led to the use of the term vernacular with somewhat different meaning.

Some have extended the term to refer to any language which is not the official language of a country. An influential 1951 Unesco report, for example, defined vernacular language as the first language of a group socially or politically dominated by a group with different language. So, in countries such as the United States where English is the language of the dominant group, a language like Spanish is referred to as a Chicano child's vernacular. But Spanish would not be regarded a vernacular language in Spain, Uruguay or Chile, where it is an official language. In this sense, Greek is a vernacular language in Australia and New Zealand, but not in Greece or Cyprus. The term vernacular simply means a language which is not official language in a particular context. When people talk about education in a vernacular language, for example, they are usually referring to education in an ethnic minority language in a particular country.

The term vernacular generally refers to the most colloquial variety in a person's linguistic repertoire. In a multilingual community this variety will often be an unstandardised ethnic or tribal language. The vernacular is the variety used for communication in the home and with close friends. It is the language of solidarity between people from the same ethnic group. By extension the term has been used to refer in a monolingual community to only in informal domains. Herbew, for example, was a language of ritual and religion with no native speakers. It was no one's 'parental tongue', and was certainly not considered a vernacular language. Sociolinguists have described the process of developing it for use as the national language of Israel as 'vernacularisations'. Its functions were extended from exclusively H function to include L functions. From being a language of ritual, Hebrew became a language of everyday communication—a vernacular language. In this sense, vernacular contrasts with ritual or classical language. The Catholic church at one time used Latin for church services, rather than vernacular languages such English, French and Italian. Using this definition, any language which has native speakers would be considered a vernacular. This is a very broad definition, and it is generally not as useful as the more specific definition which contrasts vernacular languages with standardized languages used for more formal functions.

In brief, vernacular is a term used of a language or language variety:

a. When it is contrasted with a classical language, such as Latin, e.g: Church services in the Roman Catholic church used to be conducted in Latin, but now they are in the vernacular. (e.g., in English, Italian, Swahili, etc)
b. When it is contrasted with an internationally used language such as English, e.g: If you want to teach in that country, it will be useful to know the vernacular.
c. In bilingual and multilingual countries, when it is spoken by some or most of the population but when it is not the official or the national language of a country, e.g: in addition to schools that teach in the national language, there are also vernacular schools.

**Standard languages**

Also known as standard variety and standard dialect, a standard variety of language which has the highest status in a community or nation and which is usually based on the speech and writing of educated native speakers of the language. A standard variety is generally: a. used in the news media and in literature, b. described in dictionaries and grammars, and c. taught in schools and taught to non-native speakers when they learn the language as a foreign language.

Sometimes it is the educated variety spoken in political and cultural centre of a country, e.g. the standard variety of French I based on educated Parisian French. The standard variety of American English is known as standard American English and the standard variety of British English is Standard British English.

A standard variety may show some variation in pronunciation according to the part of the country where it is spoken, e.g. Standard British English in Scotland, Wales, and Southern England. Standard English is sometimes used as a cover term for all the national standard varieties of English. These national standard varieties have differences in spelling, vocabulary, grammar, and particularly pronunciation, but there is a common core of the language. This makes it possible for educated native speakers of the various national standard varieties of English to communicate with one another.

**Lingua franca**

A language that is used for communication between different groups of people, and each speaking a different language. The lingua franca could be an internationally used language of communication (e.g. English), it could be the native language of one the groups, or it could be language which is not spoken natively by any of the groups but has a simplified sentence structure and vocabulary and is often a mixture of two or more languages (see Pidgin). The term *lingua franca* (Italian for "Frankish tongue") originated in the Mediterranean region in the Middle Ages among crusaders and traders of different language backgrounds. The term auxiliary language is sometimes used as a synonym for lingua franca.

## Regional and social dialects (variations)

**Regional variation**

Example 8:

> A British visitor to New Zealand decided while he was in Auckland he would look up an old friend from his war days. He found the address, walked up the path and knocked on the door. "Gidday," said the young man who opened the door. "what can I do for you?" "I've called to see me old mate Don Stone," said the visitor. "Oh he's dead now mate," said the young man. The visitor was about to express condolences when he was thumped on the back by Don Stone himself. The young man had said, 'Here's dad now mate', as his father came in the gate.

There are many such stories—some no doubt apocryphal—of mistakes based on regional accent differences. To British ears a New Zealander's *dad* sounds like an English person's *dead,* and *bad* sounds like *bed.* Americans and Australians, as well as New Zealanders, tell of British visitors who were given *pens* instead of *pins* and *pans* instead of *pens.* On the other hand an American's *god* sounds like an English *guard,* and *latter* sounds like *ladder* to many non-American English speakers.

There are vocabulary differences in the varieties spoken in different regions too. Australians talk of *sole parents,* for example, while people in England call them *single parent,* and New Zealanders call them *solo parents.* South Africans use the term *roket* for British *traffic-light.* British *willies* (Wellington boots) are New Zealand *gummies* (gumboots), while the word *togs* refers to very different types of clothes in different places. In New Zealand, *togs* are what you swim in. in Britain you might wear them to a formal dinner.

Example 9:

1. Do you have a match?
2. Have you got a cigarette?
3. She has gotten used to the noise.
4. She's got used to the noise.
5. He dove in, head first.
6. He dived in head first.
7. Did you eat yet?
8. Have you eaten yet?

Pronunciation and vocabulary differences are probably the differences people are most aware of between different dialects of English, but there are grammatical differences too. Can you distinguish the preferred American from the traditional British usages in the sentences in example 9? Americans prefer *do you have,* though this can now also be heard in Britain alongside the traditional British *have you got*. Americans say *gotten* where people in England

use *got*. Many Americans use *dove* while most British English speakers prefer *dived*. Americans ask *did you eat?* While the English ask *have you eaten*? Are the American or British usages predominant where you live?

The differences that English speakers throughout the world notice when they meet English speakers from other nations are similar to those noted by speakers of other languages too. Spanish and French, for example, are languages which are extensively used in a variety of countries besides Spain and France. Speakers of Spanish can hear differences of pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar in the varieties of Spanish spoken in Mexico, Spain, Argentina and Paraguay, for example. Native speakers of French can distinguish the French used in Montreal from Parisian and Haitian French. These are differences in the vocabulary of different varieties. So, for example a mendiant in France but *queteux* in Quebec. And Canadians like *aller aux vues* when they want to see a film, while Parisian like *aller au cinema*. Even grammatical gender assignment differs in the two varieties. *Appéti*t (appetite) and *midi* (midday), for instance, are feminine in Canada, but masculine in France, while the opposite is true for *automobile* and *oreille* ('ear'). Clearly Canadian French and Parisian French are different dialects.

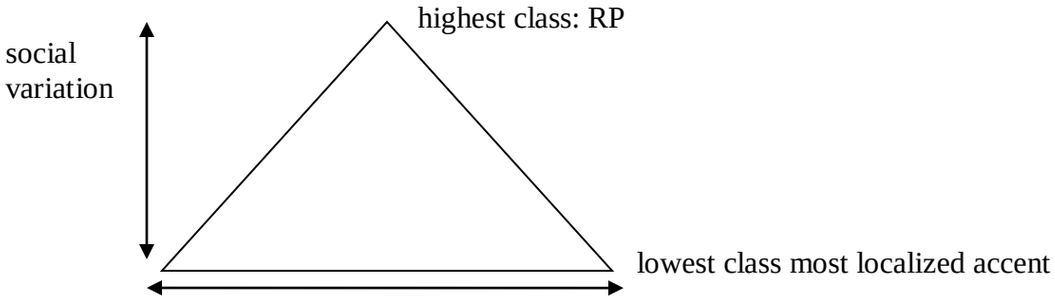
Sometimes the differences between dialects are a matter of the frequencies with which particular features occur, rather than completely different ways of saying things. People in Montreal, for example, do not always pronounce the I in phrases like *il pleut* and il fait. Parisians omit the *I* too—but less often. If you learned French in school you probably struggled to learn which verbs used *avoir* and which used *etre* in making the perfect aspect. Getting control of these patterns generally causes all kinds of headaches. It would probably have caused you even more pain if you had realized that the patterns for using *avoir* and *etre* are different in Montreal and Paris.

**Social variation**
**A social accent**
**Example 10:**

Diana: Have you heard—Jonathan's engaged to that northern girl from Cumbria!
Reg : She may be northern but I assure you she is very acceptable. Her father is a lord, and rich one at that! She has the best education money can buy. Those traces of the northern accent are fashionable these days may dear!

In earlier centuries you could tell where an English lord or lady came from by their regional form of English. But by the early twentieth century a person who spoke with a regional accent in England was most unlikely to belong to the upper class. Upper class people had an upper-class education, and that generally meant a public (i.e. private!) school where they learned to speak RP. Stands not for 'Real Posh' (as suggested to Holmes—the author of introduction to Sociolinguistics—by a young friend), but rather for Received Pronunciation—the accent of the best educated and most prestigious members of English society. It is claimed the label derives from the accent which was 'received' at the royal court, and it is sometimes identified with 'the Queen's English', although the accent used by Queen Elizabeth II is a rather old-fashioned variety of RP.

RP was promoted by the BBC for decades. It is essentially a social accent not a regional one. Indeed, it conceals a speaker's regional origins. This is nicely illustrated in figure 1, the accent triangle.




(1.1 Social and regional accent variation which is reproduced from Trudgill 1983a: 42)

As the triangle suggests, the linguist will find most linguistic variation at the lowest socio-economic level where regional differences abound. Further up the social ladder the amount of observable variation reduce till one reaches the pinnacle of RP – an accent used by less than 5% of the British population. So a linguist travelling round the Britain may collect over a dozen different pronunciations of the word grass from the working-class people she meets in different regions. She will hear very much less variation from lower-middle and middle-class people. And, at least until recently, the upper classes would pronounce the word as [gra:s] wherever they came from in England. Things are changing, however, as the exchange in the example above.

Figure 1.1 captured the distribution of accents in England until recently. Today a more accurate diagram might have a somewhat flatter top, suggesting accents other than RP can be heard amongst those who belong to the highest social class. (as figure 2 below). In other speech communities it is certainly possible to hear more than just one accent associated with the highest social group. Most well-educated Scots, Irish and Welsh speakers do not use RP, and there is more than one socially prestigious accent in these countries. And in ex-colonies of Britain such as

Australia and Canada, other accents have displaced RP from its former position as the most admired accent of English. In fact RP now tends to be perceived by many people as somewhat affected (or 'real posh!')

**Social dialects**

The stereotypical 'dialect' speaker is an elderly rural person who is all but unintelligible to modern city dwellers. But dialects are simply linguistic varieties which are distinguishable by their vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation; the speech of people from different social, as well as regional, groups may differ in these ways. Just as RP is a social accent, so Standard English is a social dialect. It is the dialect used by well-educated English speakers throughout the world. It is the variety generally taught in English-speaking schools.

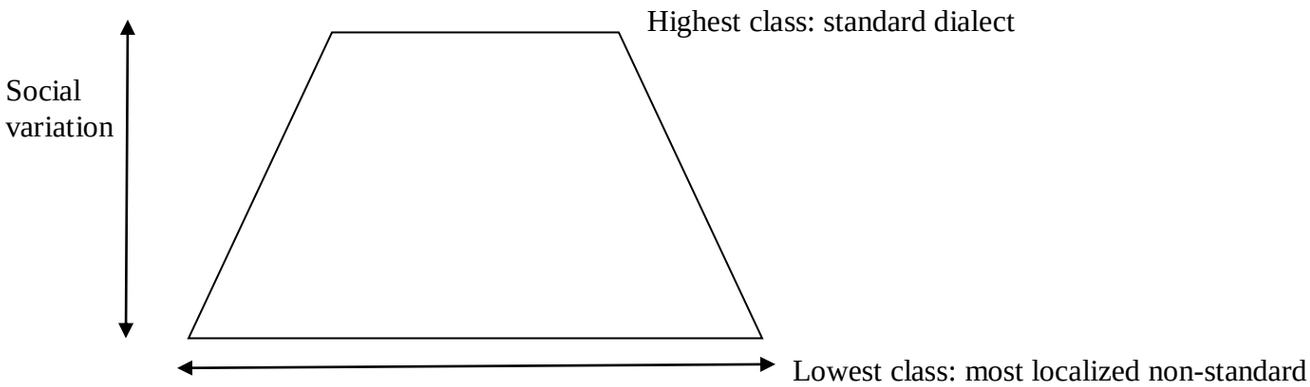
**Standard English**

Example 11:

(a) I've not washed the dishes yet today
(b) I haven't washed the dishes yet today.

Standard English is more accommodating than RP and allows for some variation within its boundaries. This is reflected in figure 1.2, the trapezium or tabled-topped mountain. The flat top reflects the broader range of variants (alternative linguistic forms) which qualify as part of the standard dialect of English in any country. It is estimated that up to 15 per cent of the British regularly use standard British English. So in standard English, a limited amount of grammatical variation is acceptable. A speaker of Standard English might produce either of the sentences in example 11 above.

The dialect we grace with the name standard English is spoken with many different accents. But, as illustrated in the discussion of regional dialects, there are also many standard Englishes. American Standard English is distinguishable from Australian standard English, for instance, and both differ from the British standard dialect.




(figure 1.2, social and regional dialect variation—Holmes, 2001: 133—reproduced from Trudgill 19831:41)

In social terms, linguistic forms which are not part of Standard English are by definition non-standard. Because the standard dialect is always the first to be codified, it is difficult to avoid defining other dialects without contrasting them with the standard. And then, because such non-standard forms are associated with the speech of less prestigious social group, the label inevitably acquires negative connotations. But it should be clear that there is nothing linguistically inferior about non-standard forms. They are simply different from the forms which happen to be used by more socially prestigious speakers. To avoid the implication that non-standard forms are inadequate deviations from the standard, some sociolinguists use the terms vernacular as an alternative to non-standard.

## Gender and age

**Gender-exclusive speech differences: non-Western communities**
**Example 12:**

> Tayana is a young Amazonian Indian woman from the north-west Amazon Basin. She lives with her husband and children and a number of other families in a longhouse beside the river. The language of her longhouse is Tuyuka, which is the language of all men in this tribe, and the language she uses to talk to her children. She comes from a different tribe and her first language is Desano. She uses Desano to her husband; and he replies in Tuyuka.

Women and men do not speak in exactly the same way as each other in any community. The Amazon Indians provide an extreme example. As described in the example above, in any longhouse the language used by a child's mother is different from her father's language, because men must marry outside their own tribe, and each tribe is distinguished by a different language. In this community, women and men speak different languages.

Less dramatically, there are communities where the language is shared by women and men, but particular linguistic features occur only in the women's speech or only in the men's speech. These features are usually small differences in pronunciation or word-shape (morphonology). In Montana, for instance, there pronunciation differences in the Gros Ventre American Indian tribe. Where the women say [kja'tsa] for 'bread' the men say [dʒa'tsa]. In this community if a person uses the wrong form for their gender, the older members of the community consider them bisexual. In Bengali, a language of India, the language of India, the women use an initial [l] where the use an initial [n] in some words.

Word-shape in other languages contrast because women and men use different affixes. In Yana, a North American Indian language, and Chiquita, a South American Indian language, some of the words used between men are longer than the equivalent words used by women and to women, because the men's forms sometimes add a suffix, as illustrated in the example below:

Example 13:

Yana

| Women's form | Men's form | |
|---|---|---|
| Ba | ba-na | 'deer' |
| Yaa | yaa-na | 'person' |
| Nisaaklu | nisaaklu-?i | 'he might go away' |
| ?au | ?au-na | 'fire' |

In Japanese, too, some of the men's forms are longer, while female forms of nouns are frequently prefixed by o-, a marker of polite or formal style. In some languages, there are also differences between the vocabulary items used by women and men, though these are never very extensive. Traditional Japanese provides some clear examples.

Example 14:

Japanese

| Women's form | Men's form | |
|---|---|---|
| otoosan | oyaji | 'father' |
| onaka | hara | 'stomach' |
| oishii | umai | 'delicious' |
| taberu | kuu | 'eat' |

In modern Japanese, these distinctions are more a matter of degrees of formality or politeness than gender; so the 'men's' forms are restricted to casual contexts and considered macho or coarse, while the 'women's forms are used by everyone in public contexts.

Some languages signal the gender of the speaker in the pronoun system. In Japanese, for instance, there are a number of words for 'I' varying primarily in formality, but women are generally restricted to the more formal variants. So *ore* is used only by men in casual contexts and *boku*, the next most casual form, is used mainly by men, while women are expected to use only the more formal variants, *atashi* and *watashi*, and the most formal *watakushi*. However, modern young Japanese women are increasingly challenging such restrictions.

**Gender and social class**

Example 15

> Linda lives in the south of England and her dad is a lawyer. When she was 10 years old she went to stay for a whole school term with her uncle Tom and auntie Bet in Wigan, Lancashire town, while her mother was recovering form a car accident. She was made to feel very welcome both in her auntie's house and at the local school. When she went home she tried to describe to her teacher what she had noticed about the way her uncle and auntie talked. 'Uncle Tom is a plumber' she told Mrs. Button ' and he talks just like the other men on the building site where he works—a bt broad. He says '*ouse'* and '*ome'* and [kup] and [bus]. When she's at home auntie Bet talks a bit like uncle Tom. She says "Me feet are killin' me [luv]. I've ad enough standin' [up] for today'. But she works in a shop and when she's talking to customers she talks more like you do Mrs. Button. She say *house* and *home* she talks real nice—just like a lady.

The linguistic features which differ in the speech of women and men in Western communities are usually features which also distinguish the speech of people from different social classes. So how does gender interact with social class? Does the speech of women in one social class resemble that of women from different classes, or does it more closely resemble the speech of the men from their own social class? The answer to this question is quite complicated, and is different for different linguistic features. These are, however, some general patterns which can be identified.

**Some simple Explanations of Women's linguistic behavior**

**'**Why can't a woman be more like a man?' (a quotation taken from Janet Holmes' Sociolinguistics: the introduction's *My Fair Lady*). When this pattern first emerged, social dialectologists asked: 'why do women use more standard form than men?' at least four different (though not mutually exclusive) explanations were suggested. The first appeals to social class and its related status for an explanation, the second refers to women's role in society, the third to women's status as a subordinate group, and the fourth to the function of speech in expressing masculinity.

## Ethnicity and social networks

When people belong to the same group, they often speak similarly. But there are many different groups in a community, and so any individual may share linguistic features with a range of other speakers. Some features indicate a person's social status; others distinguish women and men or identify a person as a teenager rather than a middle-aged citizen. There are also linguistic clues to a person's ethnicity, and closely related to all these are linguistic features which reflect the regular interactions people have—those they talk to most often. Individuals draw on all these resources when they construct their social identities.

## Language change

This term refers to change in a language which takes place over time. All living languages have changed and continue to change. For example, in English, changes which have recently been occurring include the following:

a. The distinction in pronunciation between words such as *what* and *watt* is disappearing
b. *hopefully* may be used instead of *I hope, we hope, it is to be hoped*
c. new words and expressions are constantly entering the language, e.g. *drop-out, alternative society, culture shock*.

Language change should not be confused with language shift. In order to have a clear cut among the two, let us find out Language Shift. Language shift is a change ('shift') from the use of one 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.

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