

Sociolinguistics

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Language is central to social interaction in every society, regardless of location and time period. Language and social interaction have a reciprocal relationship; language shapes social interactions and social interactions in turn shape language. The study of relationship between the language and the society assumes great significance. Generally the interaction between individuals takes place with the help of language which is affected by the sociocultural background of the individuals so to study the varying structure of language in a society becomes an important aspect for the overall development of society. Sociolinguistics is a term which examines the role of language in society. It also examines all aspects of the relationships between language and society. It also refers to the construction of societies on the basis of the structure of language used in these societies and vice-versa. Sociolinguistics is in many ways a blend of sociology and linguistics. It is sometimes referred to as the 'sociology of language', although the term suggests a bigger concern with sociological rather than linguistic explanations, whereas Sociolinguistics are principally concerned with language, or, to be more precise, with what Dell Hymes crucially calls 'socially constituted' language: with the way language is constructed by, and in turn helps to construct, society. Sociolinguistics research encompasses bilingual or diglossic communication where languages are used for different functions. Its popularity has grown very much as a reaction to the more 'armchair' methods or the principles of Chomsky regarding the structure of language, also referred as Chomskyan school. Generative linguists examine 'idealised' samples of speech in which utterances are complete, in a standard form of the language, and free from performance errors. Sociolinguistics, on the other hand, are more interested in 'real' speech, within and among communities.

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Language is one of the most powerful symbols of social behavior. In the normal transfer of information through language, one uses language to send vital social messages conveying ideas about oneself and the kind of people one associates with. Also it refers to the identity of the persons, indicating where they come from, and who they associate with. It is often surprising to know that one may judge a person's background, character, and intentions based simply

upon the person's language, dialect, or, in some instances, even the choice of a single word. Keeping in view the social role of language, it becomes imperative to concentrate on the role of language in society. Sociolinguistics has become an increasingly important and popular field of study, as certain cultures around the world expand their communication base and inter-group and interpersonal relations take on escalating significance. The basic principle of Sociolinguistics simply states that Language use symbolically represents fundamental dimensions of social behavior and human interaction. This idea of Sociolinguistics is simple, but the ways in which language reflects behavior can be complex and subtle. Further, the relationship between language and society has a vast effect on the patterns of communication varying from the broadly based international relations to narrowly defined interpersonal relationships. For example, Sociolinguists might investigate language attitudes among large populations on a national level, such as those exhibited in the United States with respect to the English the only amendment in the legislative proposal to make English the 'official' language of the United States. Similarly, one might study the status of French and English in Canada or the status of national and vernacular languages in the developing nations of the world as symbols of fundamental social relations among cultures and nationalities. In considering language as a social institution, Sociolinguists often use sociological techniques involving data from questionnaires and summary statistical data, along with information from direct observation.

A slightly different concern with language and society focuses more closely on the effect of particular kinds of social situations on language structure. For example, language contact studies focus on the origin and the linguistic composition of Pidgin and Creole languages. These special language varieties arise when speakers from mutually unintelligible language groups need a common language for communication. Throughout the world, there are many sociohistorical situations that have resulted in these specialized language situations--in the Caribbean, Africa, South America,

Asia, and the Pacific Islands. In examining language contact situations, it is also possible to examine not only the details of a particular language but also the social and linguistic details that show how bilingual speakers use each language and switch between them.

Sociolinguistics is the study of the connection between language and society and the way people use language in different social situations. It enquire the ways in which language affects the social nature of human beings, and how does social interaction shape language. It ranges greatly in depth and detail, from the study of dialects across a given region to the analysis of the way men and women speak to each other in certain situations. The basic feature of sociolinguistics is that language is variable and ever-changing. As a result, language is not uniform or constant. Rather, it is varied and inconsistent for both the individual user and within and among groups of speakers who use the same language.

People communicate in different ways in different social situations. An individual, for instance, will speak differently to a child than he or she will talk to the college professor. This socio-political variation is sometimes called register and depends not only on the occasion and relationship between the participants, but also on the participants' region, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, age, and gender. One way that Sociolinguistics study language is through dated written records. They examine both hand-written and printed documents to identify how language and society have interacted in the past. This is referred to as historical Sociolinguistics which is the study of the relationship between changes in society and changes in language over time. For example, historical Sociolinguistics studied the use and frequency of the pronoun Thou in dated documents and found that its replacement with the word You is correlated with changes in class structure in 16th and 17th century England. Sociolinguistics concern the way in which language varies according to the social context in which it is used and the social group to which it belongs. Labov terms this 'secular linguistics'. The social variables which influence speech include personal factors such as age, and education, as well as the general factors like nationality, race, and sex. All of these factors impact the language use. A major object of Labovian-type sociolinguistics is to understand how and why languages change. At its core is a very precise, empirical methodology, and its procedures are based on established ways of working

in the social sciences. In particular, methods using participant observation, in which the observers involve themselves in communities, rather than relying on random sampling for the collection of data, have led to the clear accounts of linguistic behaviour. The work of James and Leslie Milroy on working-class speech in Belfast, for example, has demonstrated the importance of social networks in mediating speech habits. Networks operate their own group dynamics and influence speech in a subtler way than the simple class categories, used by the conventional ways of sociological enquiry, would suggest. Although the 'hard edge' of sociolinguistics is concerned with accent and dialect, there is much to be explored in the field of the Sociolinguistics, ranging from the study of the growth of 'political correctness', the relationships between language on the one hand, and sex, race and ideology, to the other, have been explored, as a result, much knowledge has been added about the way in which language not only reflects the social reality, but, more controversially, constructs it. But the degree to which language serves this purpose is still a matter of debate as it depends on the insights from social anthropology and philosophy, but it gives to sociolinguistics a distinctive modernity and relevance.

Sociolinguistics also commonly study dialect. Dialect is the regional, social, or ethnic variation of a language. For example, the primary language in the United States is English but People living in the South, vary in the words they speak as compared to people who live in the Northwest. Dialects of English vary, differing from one region to the other in a country. Researchers and scholars in different countries mainly use the concept of sociolinguistics to examine various issues regarding the language for example in the United States, the Sociolinguistics focus on the vowel shift occurring in certain words such as many people in cities like Buffalo, Chicago and Cleveland now pronounce the word Bat like Bet and Bet like But. The researchers also study the Slang used by the younger generation to exhibit their affiliation with certain subgroups and to differentiate from their parents' generation. It is also examined that how words are pronounced differently according to age, gender, socioeconomic status, or race/ethnicity. For instance, African Americans sometimes pronounce certain words in a different manner as compared to the White people. Likewise, some words are pronounced differently depending on whether the person speaking was born after World War II or before. Sociolinguistics also study the vocabulary words

which vary with region and time, and the different meanings associated with certain words are also focused upon. For example, in Southern Louisiana, a certain breakfast dish is often called lost bread while in other parts of the country, it is called French toast. Similarly, words which have changed over time are also analyzed, for example the word Frock, was used to refer to a woman's dress, but today frock is rarely used.

A different approach with language and society focuses more closely on the effect of different kinds of social situations on the structure of the language. For example, language contact studies focus on the origin and the linguistic composition of pidgin and creole languages. These special varieties of languages emerge when speakers from mutually unintelligible language groups need a common language for communication. Throughout the world, there are many sociohistorical situations that have resulted in the specialized language situations such as in the Caribbean, Africa, South America, Asia, and the Pacific Islands. In examining language contact situations, it can also study not only the details of a particular language but also the social and linguistic details that show how bilingual speakers use each language and switch between them.

Another approach to language and society focuses on the situations and uses of language as an activity in its own right. The study of language in its social context tells us quite a bit about how we organize our social relationships within a particular community. Addressing a person as 'Mrs.', 'Ms.', or by a first name is not really about simple vocabulary choice but about the relationship and social position of the speaker and addressee. Similarly, the use of sentence alternatives such as *Pass the salt*, *Would you mind passing the salt*, or *I think this food could use a little salt* is not a matter of simple sentence structure; the choice involves cultural values and norms of politeness, deference, and status. Language can also be considered as a social activity by focussing, on discovering the specific patterns or social rules for conducting conversation and discourse. For example, describing the rules for opening and closing a conversation, taking turns in conversational, or telling a story or joke.

It is also possible to examine how people manage their language in relation to their cultural backgrounds and their goals of interaction. Sociolinguistics might investigate questions such as how mixed-gender conversations differ from single-gender conversations,

how differential power relations manifest themselves in language forms, how elders or caregivers teach children the ways language should be used, or how language change occurs and spreads to communities. In order to answer the questions related to language as social activity, Sociolinguistics often use ethnographic methods. That is, they attempt to gain an understanding of the values and viewpoints of a community in order to explain the behaviors and attitudes of its members.

Two trends have characterized the development of Sociolinguistics over the past several decades. First, the rise of particular specializations within this field has coincided with the emergence of more broadly based social and political issues. Thus, the focus on themes such as language and nationalism, language and ethnicity, and language and gender has corresponded with the rise of related issues in society at large. Secondly, the specialists who studied the role of language and society started applying the results of their studies to the broadly based social, educational, and political problems that probably led to their emergence as Sociolinguistic themes to begin with. Sociolinguistics thus offers a unique opportunity to bring together theory, description, and application in the study of language.

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