

Master I Classes – Sociolinguistics

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Sociolinguistics Seminar

(Courses)

Recommended Readings:

Holmes, J. (2013). An Introduction to Sociolinguistics. USA: Routledge.

Trousdale, G. (2010). An Introduction to English Sociolinguistics. UK: Edinburgh University Press

Wardhaugh, R. (2010). An Introduction to Sociolinguistics. Singapore: Wiley-Blackwell

Introduction

Language is both a system of communication between individuals and a social phenomenon. Language and society are intertwined because a society moves with language.

Sociolinguistics is a developing branch of linguistics and sociology which examines the individual and social variation of language (Spolsky, 2010). Sociolinguistics is intended to show how our use of language is governed by such factors as class, gender, race. Regional variation gives us information about the place the speaker is from. Sociolinguistics is also considered as a branch of sociology in that it shows the relationship between language use and the social basis for that use (Hudson, 1996). It differs from the sociology of language in that the focus of sociolinguistics is the effect of the society on the language, whereas the latter's interest is on the language's effect on the society (Bell, 1976). Sociolinguistics is a practical scientific discipline which researches into the language that is actually used in order to formulate theories about the language change (ibid).

Sociolinguistics in the West first appeared in the 1960s and was pioneered by linguists such as William Labov in the US and Basil Bernstein in the UK. In the 1960s

- William Labov is often regarded as the founder of the study of sociolinguistics. He is especially noted for introducing the quantitative study of language variation and change, making the sociology of language into a scientific discipline.

I. Sociolinguistics: defining the concept

There are numerous definitions of sociolinguistics; however, each of these definitions doesn't fail to acknowledge that sociolinguistics has to do with language use and a society's response to it.

1. The study of the link between language and society, of language variation, and of attitudes about language (Spolsky, 2010).
2. A branch of anthropological linguistics (studies the form and use of language in different cultures) that examines how language and culture are related, and how language is used in different social contexts (Bell, 1976).
3. A study of the relationship between language and social factors such as class, age, gender and ethnicity (Hudson, 1996).
4. The study of the social variation of language (Wardhaugh, 2010).
5. Sociolinguistics is the study of the effect of any and all aspects of society, including cultural norms, expectations, and context, on the way language is used (Trudgill, 2000).

In all these definitions, it is clear that sociolinguistics is a discipline that makes a link between sociology and linguistics. Every society has its linguistic codes that are acceptable for interaction (Meyerhoff, 2006). Sociolinguistics shows how groups in a given society are separated by certain social variables like ethnicity, religion, status, gender, age and level of education and how adherence to these variables is used to categorize individuals in social classes (Hudson, 1996).

Some of the factors investigated by sociolinguists that can affect the way people speak are listed below:

- A. **Social class:** the position of the speaker in the society is often measured by the level of education, parental background, profession and their effect on syntax and lexis used by the speaker (Trudgill, 2000). An important factor influencing the way of formulating sentences is, according to many sociolinguistics, the social class of the speaker. In order to make the description accurate, 2 main groups of language users are distinguished:
- Those performing non-manual work and those with more years of education are the middle class;
 - While those who perform some kind of manual work are “working class”.

The additional terms “upper” and “lower” are frequently used to subdivide the social classes. (ibid).

- B. **Social context:** the register of language used depending on changing situations: formal language in formal meetings and informal usage in informal meetings (Spolsky, 2010). It is notable that people are acutely aware of the differences in speech patterns that mark their social and are often able to adjust their style to the interlocutor (ibid). Adapting own speech to reduce social distance is called “convergence” (ibid). Sometimes, when a person wants to emphasize the social distance, s/he makes use of a process called “divergence”, purposefully using idiosyncratic forms (ibid).

- C. **Geographical origins:** slight differences in pronunciation between speakers indicate the geographical region they come from (Trudgill, 2000). To describe a variety of language that differs in grammar, lexis and pronunciation from others, the term dialect is used (Hudson, 1996). Moreover, each member of the community has a unique way of speaking due to life experience, education, age and aspiration (Trudgill, 2000). An individual personal variation of language use is called and idiolect (ibid).

- D. **Ethnicity:** there are differences between the use of a given language by its native speakers and other ethnic groups (Bell, 1976). It means there numerous factors influencing idiolect some are listed above; two others need to be clarified. These are: jargon and slang.

Jargon is a specific technical vocabulary related with a particular field of interest, or topic (ibid). For example, words such as convergence, social class, dialect are a sociolinguistic jargon; whereas, slang is a type of language characterized by the use of unusual words and phrases instead of conventional norms.

- E. **Nationality:** this is visible in the case of English language: British English differs from American English or Canadian English. The study of language variation is concerned with social constraints determining language in its contextual environment (Hudson, 1996). ‘code-switching’ is the term given to the use of different varieties of language in different social situations.

- F. **Gender:** patterns of language use of men are different from those of women in terms of quantity of speech and the intonation patterns (Trudgill, 2000).

- G. **Age:** the age of the speaker influences the use of vocabulary and grammar complexity (Bell, 1976).

Introduction

As we are learning, the study of language in society is called sociolinguistics. The real basis for much of sociolinguistics is that the variations -- the differences. Not everyone who speaks a given language speaks it in the same way. Actually, every individual uses language in their own unique way. An individual's particular way of speaking is called an **idiolect**. Language variants spoken by entire groups of people are referred to as **dialects**.

- I. **Dialectology** is a branch of sociolinguistics that studies the systematic variants of a language. The term dialect was first coined in 1577 from the Latin *dialectus*, *way of speaking*. Dialectal variation is present in most language areas and often has important social implications.

II. What's the difference between "language" and "dialect"?

To study dialects we must first decide **how to determine when two similar forms of a language are merely dialects of the same language and when are they separate languages**. The difference between dialect and language is not clear-cut, but rather depends on at least three factors, which often contradict one another.

A. The first criterion is purely linguistic, **mutual intelligibility**: A criterion of **mutual intelligibility** is often applied as a test of whether a pair of speakers is speaking two different languages or one or two dialects of the same language: if the two speakers can understand one another, then they must be speaking the same language. If they cannot, then the two forms would normally be considered separate language.

B. The second criterion is **cultural** and takes into account the opinion of the speakers: do the speakers themselves think of their form of language as a variety of a more standard form of speech? This is certainly true of the varieties of English spoken in the United States. Most anyone speaking Southern English or Brooklynese would consider their language forms to be local variants of American English; some people use the word dialect to mean "an accent," although an accent is only the sound aspect of a dialect; dialects also differ in grammar and vocabulary.

C. A final criterion in differentiating language from dialect involves a language's **political status**, a factor that is external to the form of the language and sometimes even at variance with the culture of the speakers. Do the political authorities in a country consider two language forms to be separate languages or dialects of a single language? This was the case with Ukrainian and Russian in the days of the Russian Empire, where Ukrainian (called Little Russian) was considered a substandard variety of Russian (called Great Russian).

Are today's languages once dialects of another language?

It could be argued that most languages spoken today were once simply dialects of another language. When a single people migrate in separate directions and the resulting groups no longer maintain close communication with one another, then dialects emerge and in time can evolve into separate languages).

The Romance languages are an example for this development. Originally, **French, Spanish, and Italian** were very much alike. They were all variations of **Latin**, and a citizen of the late Roman period would have regarded them as dialects of the same Latin. Today, the Romance languages are much more distinct. We can still see that they are closely related to each other, but they are definitely not dialects. These are **national variations** of the Romance language family - completely separate languages that are genetically related. So when people are cut off from each other--either by geography, by ethnic separatism, or by political separation-- which group tends to change the least and retain the older forms of a language?

What factors speed up or hinder the formation of dialects?

Since language naturally changes all the time, a language spread out over a large territory or over a geographically diverse territory. Language unity can still be maintained by a unified system of education, by the influence of the mass media, by the social mixing that occurs within a highly mobile population. Common culture and political institutions also tend to resist the emergence of new dialects.

Because dialects very often emerge because of language spread and subsequent isolation, they may often be described in terms of geography. In such cases linguists usually find a dialect continuum. The difference between one regional dialect and another is often a gradual series of changes, not an abrupt change in any one location, such as the gradual transition from High to Low German. Instead of marking the boundaries of dialects on maps, linguists often mark the distribution of various features with maps called **isoglosses** (such as the pronunciation of *greasy* [s] vs. [z] south of Pennsylvania.)

In addition to geography, other factors may lead to dialectal change. One is ethnicity, the cultural, religious and racial differences that separate groups of people; another factor in the development and perpetuation of dialects is social differentiation. In England the upper classes speak different dialects than the lower classes.

Are dialects and accent the same thing?

These are two terms which should not be confused. While a **dialect** is a distinct variation of a language bound to geographical regions or a social stratification, the **accent** is a blend of linguistic background with speaker effort to pronounce the standard language or a distinct dialect of a completely different language group. The accent speaks may show hence only occurs when they use a language variety or a language different from their own, like when a person speaks French with an English accent.

Conclusion

The best we can do in defining a dialect as something different from a language is to say the following: If two language variants are mutually intelligible, they are dialects of the same language rather than separate languages -- provided, of course, that there is no overriding political reason to think otherwise. And, if two language variants are not mutually intelligible, they are different languages -- unless there is some overriding political or cultural reason to consider them the same language. One exasperated linguist, Uriel Weinreich, said that a language is simply a dialect with an army and navy. Thus, the difference between dialect and language is partly linguistic and partly a matter of opinion based on extra-linguistic considerations.

III. Language change:

Language change is the phenomenon by which permanent alterations are made in the features and the use of a language over time. Language change affects all areas of language use: sound changes, lexical changes, semantic changes, and syntactic changes. The branch of linguistics that is expressly concerned with changes in a language (or in languages) over time is historical linguistics.

All languages change over time, and vary from place to place. They may change as a result of social or political pressures, such as invasion, colonisation and immigration. New vocabulary is required for the latest inventions, such as transport, domestic appliances and industrial equipment, or for sporting, entertainment and leisure pursuits.

Language is always changing, evolving, and adapting to the needs of its users. This isn't a bad thing; if English hadn't changed since, say, 1950, we wouldn't have words to refer to modems, fax machines, or cable TV. As long as the needs of language users continue to change, so will the language. The change is so slow that from year to year we hardly notice it, except to grumble every so often about the 'poor English' being used by the younger generation! However, reading Shakespeare's writings from the sixteenth century can be difficult. If you go back a couple more centuries, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* are very tough sledding, and if you went back another 500 years to try to read *Beowulf*, it would be like reading a different language.

Many of the changes that occur in language begin with teens and young adults. As young people interact with others their own age, their language grows to include words, phrases, and constructions that are different from those of the older generation. Some have a short life span (heard *groovy* lately?), but others stick around to affect the language as a whole.

IV. Types of language change:

Sporadic and systematic language change: "Changes in language may be systematic or sporadic. The addition of a vocabulary item to name a new product, for example, is a sporadic change that has little impact on the rest of the lexicon. "Systematic changes, as the term suggests, affect an entire system or subsystem of the language. A conditioned systematic change is brought about by context or environment.

Pidgin: "A pidgin is the combination of two or more languages which sometimes occurs in trade contact, multi-ethnic or refugee situations, where participants need a functioning common language. . . . Sometimes the pidgin becomes stable and established and comes to be spoken as a mother-tongue by children: the language has then become a **creole**, which quickly develops in complexity and is used in all functional settings. The process of turning a pidgin into a creole is called *creolization*."

(Robert Lawrence Trask and Peter Stockwell, *Language and Linguistics: The Key Concepts*. Routledge, 2007).

It took its origin in the inability of 19th century Chinese to articulate the word business. It came out at bigeon or bidgin.

A pidgin is a simplified version of one language that combines the vocabulary of a number of different languages. Pidgins are often just used between members of different cultures to communicate for things like trade.

Creole: A language that developed historically from a pidgin and came into existence at a fairly precise point in time and has a complete grammar of its own.

Lingua franca: A lingua franca is a language used by different populations to communicate when they do not share a common language. Generally, a lingua franca is a third language that is distinct from the native language of both parties involved in the communication. Sometimes as the language becomes more widespread, the native populations of an area will speak the lingua franca to each other as well.

I. Terms of speech community

a) Speech community: Speech community is a term in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology for a group of people who use the same variety of a language and who share specific rules for speaking.

b) Diglossia: In sociolinguistics, a situation in which two distinct varieties of a language are spoken within the same speech community is called Diglossia. Bilingual diglossia is a type of diglossia in which one language is used for writing and another for speech.

II. Bilinguals and Bilingualism:

A. Bilingual is a person who uses at least two languages with some degree of proficiency. Although a bilingual in everyday use is usually considered as an individual who can speak, interact, read or understand two languages equally well (which in this case it is called a balanced bilingual), but a bilingual person usually has a better knowledge of one language than another.

B. Bilingualism is defined as the use of at least two languages either by an individual or by a group of speakers. Bilingualism is the norm in the most of the countries of the world. Ambi-bilingualism is a term in bilingualism which is defined as the capability and aptitude to function equally well in two or more languages across a wide range of domains.

Half of the world's inhabitants speak more than one language, every day. Bilingualism is a phenomenon existing all over the world, on all continents and in most countries of the world. In fact, only ten per cent of the world's (approximately) 220 countries or states can be considered unilingual. For example, these relatively rare monolingual countries include Barbados, Cuba, Iceland and Liechtenstein. The country with the largest number of languages is the island of New Guinea (with 830 languages). Canada has 76 different languages, counting all the First Nations languages and the two official languages. In countries where two or more languages are spoken, it is very rare that these languages have the same population, social or legal status. Also, their geographical distribution is often different.

Why do we become bilingual? Because we were born into a family where the parents speak two different languages, because we live in a bilingual society where a foreign language does not correspond to the language that is spoken at home, because we immigrated to another country, or because it is a requirement for certain professions (e.g. translation, journalism abroad), etc.

III. Bilingualism - Types of Bilingualism

A. Early bilingualism - there are two types: simultaneous early bilingualism and consecutive (or successive) early bilingualism.

a) Simultaneous early bilingualism refers to a child who learns two languages at the same time, from birth. This generally produces a strong bilingualism, called additive bilingualism. This also implies that the child's language development is bilingual.

b) Successive early bilingualism refers to a child who has already partially acquired a first language and then learns a second language early in childhood (for example, when a child moves to an environment where the dominant language is not his native language). This generally produces a strong bilingualism (or additive bilingualism), but the child must be given time to learn the second language, because the second language is learned at the same time as the child learns to speak. This implies that the language development of the child is partly bilingual.

- B. **Late bilingualism** – refers to bilingualism when the second language is learned after the age of 6 or 7; especially when it is learned in adolescence or adulthood. Late bilingualism is a consecutive bilingualism which occurs after the acquisition of the first language (after the childhood language development period). This is what also distinguishes it from early bilingualism. With the first language already acquired, the late bilingual uses their experience to learn the second language.

- C. **Additive bilingualism and subtractive bilingualism** – The term additive bilingualism refers to the situation where a person has acquired the two languages in a balanced manner. It is a strong bilingualism. Subtractive bilingualism refers to the situation where a person learns the second language to the detriment of the first language, especially if the first language is a minority language. In this case, mastery of the first language decreases, while mastery of the other language (usually the dominant language) increases. These expressions and their associated concepts were created by Wallace Lambert, the Canadian researcher who has been given the title of “the father of bilingualism research”.

- D. **Passive bilingualism** - refers to being able to understand a second language without being able to speak it. Children who respond in a relevant way in English when they are addressed in French could become passive bilinguals, as their mastery of oral expression in French decreases.

Conclusion: To sum up, in this research provides a clear and precise description of the types and the characteristics of various types of bilingualism. The bilinguals were classified according to the distinction between the degree of fluency and competence in the languages spoken, by the context and manner of acquisition of the languages, by age, and as based on the hypothesized processing mechanisms.

It is very important to remember that most of these dimensions are usually interrelated. It can be argued that one who is exposed to two languages from birth (simultaneous bilingual) can have a better opportunity to be a balanced bilingual. Bilinguals can be classified based on the various dimensions and facets; both at the individual and as well as at the social levels. Therefore depending on the dimensions of their bilingual characteristics, they can be classified into different types of bilinguals. It should be clearly mentioned that a second element of complexity comes from the fact that these dimensions of bilingualism are continuous and not simply categorical constructs. One cannot draw clear boundaries between different types of bilinguals within a given dimension.

Should One Expose a Child to Two Languages From Birth?

Specialists are unanimous in their opinion: exposing a child to two languages from birth is the best way for the child to become bilingual.

In fact, this language exposure can even begin during pregnancy! According to a report on early childhood development by the Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council of the United States, the capacity to learn a language is optimal from the 34th week of pregnancy until the age of 12 months, during the period when the brain synapses are forming.

Specialists agree that there is a decline in the ability to learn a second language after about the age of 6 or 7.

Myth: Some people claim that it is better to wait for a child to learn the basics of a language well, before making the child learn another language. This way, we think that the child will be able to “transfer” the knowledge learned to the new language.

Reality: Even though the child could be learning a second language well at an early age, by not exposing the child to that language we could be depriving the child of several years of optimal learning.

Myth: Early bilingualism will delay the language development of a child.

Reality: This myth stems from research dating back to the 1920s and 1930s which was proved later to be wrong. If the child has language developmental delays or difficulties, those will be observed in both languages. Research indicates that the pace of language acquisition is relatively similar between monolingual and bilingual children. However, don't forget that a bilingual child is learning two language systems at the same time, with two sets of sounds (e.g., the 36 sounds of French, or the 44 sounds of English), two sets of vocabulary and two grammatical systems. This requires a lot of analysis which may give the impression that the bilingual child is slower. If one language is more dominant than the other, this may simply just reflect a greater exposure to that language.

Trilingualism – A Word to Trilingual Families

There are few systematic studies on the steps for the acquisition of a third language at an early age. It is thought that the third language acquisition process is no different from that of the second, but that it is more rapid, "because of the effective learning strategies and very developed language awareness in bilingual children

In this case, a "one parent, one language" principle could expose the child to three languages. For example, in a family in British Columbia where one of the parents speaks Japanese and the other French, we could presume that each parent addresses the child in their first language when they are alone with the child. The language the parents communicate in is likely to be English. The language of the surrounding society will be English. In this way, the child will associate the use of the three languages with distinct people and situations.

It seems that trilingualism is less likely to be as stable as bilingualism. According to the research, inevitably one of the three languages becomes the least frequently used.

Trilingual children also do code switching when they are young, for the same reasons as bilingual children. Their trilingual code switching is rarer than their bilingual code switching (their use of three languages in the same sentence is rarer than their use of two languages in the same sentence)

It is worth mentioning that the parents in a trilingual family are usually bilingual themselves, or even trilingual.

Here are the typical durations for the acquisition of expressive language (for children to be able to express themselves orally):

- for monolingual children expressing themselves in the language of their mother, around 3.5 years;
- for bilingual children, in both languages (mother and father), between three and five years;
- for trilingual children, in three languages (mother, father, and surrounding society), around five or six years.

IV. language choice

Multilingualism: Multilingualism is the ability of an individual speaker or a community of speakers to communicate effectively in three or more languages. Contrast with *monolingualism*, the ability to use only one language. A person who can speak multiple languages is known as a *polyglot* or a *multilingual*.

Code switching: *Code switching* is the practice of moving back and forth between two languages, or between two dialects or registers of the same language. Also called *code-mixing* and *style shifting*. Code switching (CS) occurs far more often in conversation than in writing.

Borrowing: A word from one language that has been adapted for use in another.

The English language has been described by David Crystal as an "insatiable borrower." More than 120 other languages have served as sources for the contemporary vocabulary of English.

Etymology: From Old English, "becoming"

Reasons for Language Borrowing One language may possess words for which there are no equivalents in the other language. There may be words for objects, social, political, and cultural institutions and events or abstract concepts which are not found in the culture of the other language. We can take some examples from the English language throughout the ages. English has borrowed words for types of houses (e.g. *castle, mansion, teepee, wigwam, igloo, bungalow*). It has borrowed words for cultural institutions (e.g. *opera, ballet*). It has borrowed words for political concepts (e.g. *perestroika, glasnost, apartheid*). It often happens that one culture borrows from the language of another culture words or phrases to express technological, social or cultural innovations." (Colin Baker and Sylvia Prys Jones, *Encyclopedia of Bilingualism and Bilingual Education*. Multilingual Matters, 1998)

Introduction

Decisions around language policy and planning are made around the globe every day, both formally by governments and informally by scholars and community leaders. These decisions influence the right to use and maintain languages, affect language status, and determine which languages are nurtured. Language policy and planning decisions have a major impact on language vitality and, ultimately, on the rights of the individual.

Language planning is not necessarily conducted at the national level. It can also be carried out by ethnic, religious or occupational groups. In the case of language communities that are divided by borders, language planning may also involve more than one country (on the governmental or non-governmental level) or international or regional bodies and conferences.

One international organization (based in the U.S.) that is involved in considerable amount of language planning around the world, especially for people with unwritten languages, is SIL International.

I. Language planning is a deliberate effort to influence the function, structure, or acquisition of languages or language variety within a speech community. The goals of language planning generally include making planning decisions and possibly changes for the benefit of communication.

Goals, objectives and strategies are made to change the way a language is used. For many languages there are special organisations, that look after the language. Examples of such organizations are the Academie Française for French or the British Council for English.

II. Types of language planning

A. Status planning: first, we have to define the term “language status”. Language status is the position or standing of a language vis-à-vis other languages, thus status planning refers to decisions and activities aimed at changing the functions and uses of languages (or language varieties) within a particular speech community. Example: the decision to use Hebrew as a medium of instruction in Jewish schools in Palestine from the end of the 19th century.

B. Corpus planning: refers to the prescriptive intervention in the forms of a language, whereby planning decisions are made to engineer changes in the structure of the language. The aim is to fit language forms to serve desired functions. Unlike status planning, which is primarily undertaken by administrators and politicians, corpus planning generally involves planners with greater linguistic expertise. Example: creating new words, publishing dictionaries... etc.

C. Acquisition planning: acquisition planning is integrated into a larger language planning process in which the statuses of languages are evaluated, corpuses are revised and the changes are finally introduced to society on a national, state or local level through education systems, ranging from primary schools to universities. This process of change can entail a variety of modifications, such as an alteration in student textbook formatting, a change in methods of teaching an official language... etc.

I. **The process of language planning:**

- A. **Selection:** is a process of choosing a certain language variety to be used for certain functions in a society. Example: a selection of a language to be national or official.
- B. **Codification:** having selected a variety, this latter is then codified in terms in how it's written "graphization", its grammar (grammatication) and its vocabulary (lexicalization).
- C. **Implementation:** implementation typically involves using the chosen variety in materials (books, newspapers, pamphlets, websites, radio, broadcasts... etc.
- D. **Elaboration:** (also called modernization) covers all aspects of corpus planning in which language is developed to meet the needs of modern society. This can be done by: borrowings from other languages, extension of meanings of existing words, for example, terms for technological items such as mobile phones and computers to go in parallel with technological progress.