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The background of the page features a large, faint watermark of the University of Ammar Thelidji-Laghouat logo. The logo is circular, with the university's name in Arabic at the top and in English at the bottom. In the center is a stylized illustration of a classical building with columns and a pediment, with a red flame or torch rising from the base. The entire logo is enclosed within a green circular border with small dots.

STUNDENTS' HANDBOOK OF SOCIOLINGUISTICS

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This handout is a short and practical guide to the field of Sociolinguistics intended for Master's students enrolled in a single-semester module. Students are expected to have had some previous exposure to Sociolinguistics (Third year) at undergraduate level but not to have any specialist knowledge of the field. Its aim is to give students a practical overview of language use in the social world, introducing them to some of the main concepts, terms, theories and methods which are used in sociolinguistic investigation. Each section roughly corresponds to a lecture slot in the course and key terms are defined with the help of authentic real-world examples and, where appropriate, Arabic- and non-Arabic-based case studies.

The handout is designed to meet the learning outcomes for the module, which, as a "discovery unit", places particular emphasis on students' ability to think critically, draw connections between different subfields of knowledge, and reflect on the functions and impact of language in society. For this reason, in addition to key definitions and basic introductory overviews, each section includes a number of exercises and points for discussion. A glossary, sample exam questions and a reading list for independent study are also provided. Although it is not intended to be used as a textbook for the course, we hope it will serve as a useful and student-friendly "starter pack" which can provide you with the knowledge and confidence you need to investigate a wide range of sociolinguistic issues, both in applied and academic contexts, and in particular if you are considering doing sociolinguistic fieldwork or undertaking a more advanced piece of research or dissertation on an Arabic language or multilingualism topic.

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What is Sociolinguistics?

Learning Objective

Upon completing this lesson, learners should be able to:

- Define sociolinguistics as a multidisciplinary area of study.
- Identify the main areas of sociolinguistic investigation.
- Explain the reciprocal relationship between language and study, providing concrete examples.
- Clarify why it is crucial to study language within its social context.
- Differentiate between micro and macro levels of sociolinguistic analysis.

1. Introduction: Language beyond Immediate Transactions

When we say sociolinguistics, we are obviously referring to language and society. It is inevitable to talk about language events without pertaining to social context because every social setting determines and shapes how we speak, and the way we speak defines what kind of interaction is taking place. This means that every instance of language use falls within the scope of sociolinguistic enquiry; this may be technically true and theoretically valid. However, it should be noted that it is not always feasible nor realistic to claim that sociolinguistics is the study of every possible linguistic situation. Given this reciprocal relationship between language and social context, this field covers a wide range of essential topics that need to be explored, for it aids the reader to grasp the core of this course which is how language shapes and is shaped by societies in which it is used.

Sociolinguistics studies everything in relation to language, and everything you have studied about language has something to do with sociolinguistics. You may find a plethora of resources talking about sociolinguistics and what it really is; however, most books focus on what contemporary sociolinguistics is neglecting the naissance of a growing baby field from a mother discipline which is dialectology. We will delve into this field with more details in another section; what is crucial at this level is to fathom what sociolinguists really do.

Sociolinguistics is simply the study of how language is actually used in everyday life under the consciously visible norms of society such as politeness and the unconsciously hidden societal rules like attitudes towards various varieties. Sociolinguistics is a very broad-brimmed discipline that implicates many areas of language inquiry; many researchers may identify themselves as sociolinguistics, but they have totally distinct involvement using varying methods of investigation. I can hear you asking yourself what exactly is sociolinguistics then. Well, sociolinguistics tackles language use within individual's daily interactions, focuses on how languages vary from a region to another, examines how language is never the same as it was in the past and also explores how governments decide on one particular variety to be a medium of instruction in schools while another to be used in media or courts reflecting identity, power, politics and social values.

2. Leading Scholar's Definitions of Sociolinguistics

The following are some prominent definitions of sociolinguistics; consider the similarities and differences between these definitions in alignment with epistemological grounding and research scopes:

- **Ronald Wardaugh (2006, p. 13):** 'Sociolinguistics is concerned with investigating the relationship between language and society with the goal of understanding the structure of language and how it is used in communication'.
- **William Labov (1972, p.xiii):** 'Sociolinguistics is the study of language in its social context'.
- **Peter Trudgill (2000, p.21):** 'Sociolinguistics is that part of linguistics which is concerned with language as a social and cultural phenomenon'.
- **Mesthrie, Swann, Deumert & Leap (2009, p. 5):** 'Sociolinguistics is the study of language in society, of language as a social and cultural practice'.
- **Dell Hymes (1974, p. 25):** 'The social study of language is not just a reflection of society but is a means of creating and maintaining the society itself'.
- **Janet Holmes & Nick Wilson (2017, p. 1):** 'Sociolinguistics is the study of the relationship between language and the social context in which it

is used. It examines the way people use language in different social settings and how language variation reflects social structures and values’.

- **Miriam Meyerhoff (2018, p. 1):** ‘Sociolinguistics is about the interaction of language and society. It investigates how social identities are constructed through language and how linguistic variation both reflects and creates social categories’.
- **Rajend Mesthrie & William L. Leap (2022, p. 4):** ‘Sociolinguistics is a field that explores the dynamic and socially embedded nature of language use. It connects linguistic practices with issues of identity, ideology, inequality, and mobility in an increasingly globalised world’.
- **Monica Heller (2011, p. 10) Critical Sociolinguistics:** ‘Sociolinguistics is not just the study of language in society, but the study of how language practices are part of the production and reproduction of social life, including power, inequality, and change’.
- **Ben Rampton (2020, p.7) Sociolinguistics in Practice:** ‘Sociolinguistics is the study of language in everyday life. It looks at how people use language to do things, build relationships, and make sense of their social worlds’.
- **Tove Skutnabb-Kangas (2000, p. xx):** ‘Sociolinguistics examines how power relations influence language hierarchies, language rights, and language policies, often privileging some languages while marginalizing others’.

Drawing from the range of definitions presented, it can be deduced that sociolinguistics is not merely concerned with variation in linguistic behaviour across social groups (as in variationist sociolinguistics); rather, it constitutes an interdisciplinary field that sources its data from linguistics, sociology, psychology, anthropology, and even education.

Across these scholars' definitions, you can easily trace the core essence of sociolinguistics. First, they clearly assert that sociolinguistics is a socially grounded discipline that investigates the social face of language and how language is a social determinant of language use among groups within societies. That is to say, sociolinguistics determines how groups are differentiated by social factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, region, education, occupation, religion and social status. Second,

they emphasize the fact that language not only reflects who we are as social individuals, but also plays an active role in shaping the society to which we belong, reinforcing the social norms that govern it.

It is also noted that sociolinguistics addresses instances of language change, tracking how linguistic behaviour changes over time due to a variety of reasons such as mobility, colonization, migration, contact, technological advancement, showcasing the dynamic nature of language. For example, in an Algerian speech community, any external member can evidently discern how Algerian speakers use and integrate many French and English words into their dialect such as, 'chargi' from (charger), 'fatigui' from (fatigué), 'commenti' (from comment), 'posti' from 'post'; demonstrating cases of linguistics hybridity and social mobility.

Interestingly, many novice learners in the field fail to notice the legislative and institutional facets of language use, such as language regulations and the hierarchical ranking of languages within speech communities. The scope of sociolinguistics extends beyond language variation and social identity to further encompass institutional decisions and legal frameworks that determine the official and/or national status of languages. Yes, this is sociolinguistics; one may ask: how does a field concerned with everyday language practices extend to governmental decisions? The answer lies in the fact that governments cannot effectively communicate their intended messages to the public, society at large, without reaching citizens in their own socially meaningful and identity-linked language.

A pertinent example is the case of Tamazight that is recognized as a national (2002) and official language (2016) in Algeria, representing institutional initiatives to address linguistic and cultural identity. Given that a large segment of Algeria is of Tamazight origin, Amazigh-speaking communities felt ostracized by their government because of the dominance of Arabic in education, media and public signage. In response, Tamazight was incorporated in official and public discourse acknowledging Algeria's linguistic and cultural diversity.

Based on what has been illustrated above, we can provide a synthesised definition for sociolinguistics as follows:

Sociolinguistics is the multidisciplinary functional study of language within its social context. It seeks to explore the reciprocal relationship between language and society and uncover how language

reflects social structures and values (encoded in gender, age, class and ethnicity) and how it constructs, shapes and challenges social realities.

3. Conclusion

As a conclusion, sociolinguistics is generally conceived as a dynamic and multidisciplinary field of inquiry. It derives its epistemology and methodology from linguistics, sociology, anthropology and psychology in order to explore the inextricable link between language and the social world. Its paradigms range from micro-level analyses of phonological, lexical, syntactic features of idiolects to macro-level examinations of social varieties. Sociolinguistics emphasise that studying language comprehensively cannot be achieved without reference to the social context. Apart from being a fruitful academic exercise, sociolinguistics offers an essential framework for understanding how language reflects, reinforces, shapes or even challenges social structures, identities and power dynamics. Adopting a sociolinguistic perspective allows researchers to treat language not only as an abstract system of rules but also as a living social practice, revealing that linguistic choices are never neutral; rather, they are conscious or unconscious mechanisms through which individuals build, maintain and negotiate social ties.

The Journey of the Discipline: From Dialectology to Sociolinguistics

Learning Objective

Upon completing this lesson, learners should be able to:

- Understand the scope and central purpose of sociolinguistics.
- Describe the historical development of the discipline.
- Identify the key figures who contributed to the emergence and evolution of sociolinguistics

1. Introduction

Before the emergence of sociolinguistics as a discipline, linguistic variation was studied through the lens of dialectology, which focused primarily on regional differences in pronunciation (accents), vocabulary (dialects), and grammar. This approach was largely concerned with mapping rural speech patterns and identifying geographical boundaries of dialects. This section outlines the key phases through which the study of language variation evolved, highlighting the gradual shift from purely regional and rural perspectives to more socially grounded understandings of linguistic behaviour

2. Phase One: Traditional Dialectology (19th–mid-20th century):

Before sociolinguistics was formally established as a field, instances of language variation were addressed by dialectologists. You may ask: what is dialectology, and how is it related to sociolinguistics? Does it have something to do with dialects? The answer is yes. Traditional dialectology, also referred to as regional dialectology, is considered the root of sociolinguistics. This branch of linguistics focused on tracing regional differences in language, particularly in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. Dialectology was especially prominent in the 19th and early 20th centuries, prior to the rise of sociolinguistics.

The scope of dialectology was closely tied to historical and comparative linguistics, where scholars aimed to compare, classify, and track changes in language

varieties over time. Regional dialectology mapped patterns of language variation across rural areas, concentrating on stable and conservative linguistic features. One of the central practices in this field was the collection of phonological and lexical data from speakers in different locations. These items were then plotted onto dialect maps to visually illustrate regional language variation.

For example, the word for ‘bread’ might differ between areas: (bread) in one region, (loaf) in another, or in the Algerian context, (khobz) /xubz/ in some areas and (kesra)

/kesra/ in others. Pronunciation differences were also common; for instance, the word ‘said’ might be pronounced /qa:l/ in one area, /ga:l/ in another, and /ʔa:l/ in some interior regions. Dialectology marked such distinctions using dialect maps, which showed where each variant appeared and where it faded, thus revealing local dialect boundaries and regional speech patterns. These lines, which indicate where a particular linguistic feature appears and where it begins to fade geographically, are referred to by dialectologists as isoglosses.

Each isogloss represents a specific linguistic feature, whether grammatical, lexical, or phonological, and when these features change within the same geographical area, they form what is known as an isogloss cluster. When several of these features change within the same geographical area, we refer to this as an isogloss cluster. In other words, when multiple isoglosses align in one region, it indicates that this area has undergone several linguistic changes, thereby marking a dialect boundary, the point where one regional dialect ends and another begins. For example, in the Algerian context, speakers in one region may say /xubz/, /qa:l/, and /bənt/, while speakers in a neighbouring region say /kesra/, /ga:l/, and /tufla/, illustrating how isoglosses can define dialect boundaries. If these shifts in vocabulary and pronunciation all occur around the same geographical area, forming an isogloss cluster, then that area constitutes a dialect boundary.

2.1. The NORMs:

To identify and map such dialect boundaries, dialectologists needed consistent and reliable data from speakers who best reflected traditional regional speech. This raises a fundamental question: how was linguistic data collected in traditional dialectology, and from whom were such data obtained? Dialectologists did not gather information randomly; rather, they typically selected a specific group of speakers described as *Non-mobile, Older, Rural, and Male*—commonly referred to as **NORMs**.

These were individuals who spoke only the local dialect and had spent most or all of their lives in the same location. According to dialectologists, this group represented the most "authentic," "conservative," and least "contaminated" speakers—minimally influenced by external factors such as urbanization, formal education, or media exposure.

The question that arises is: why NORMs? Non-mobile individuals were thought to possess a speech variety that was less influenced by contact with other dialects and thus more representative of the traditional local variety. Older speakers, typically aged 50 and above, were believed to reflect greater linguistic authenticity, as they were more likely to retain older or more conservative linguistic features that were beginning to disappear among younger generations. The category *rural* referred to speakers from less urbanized villages, which were often geographically and socially isolated. These settings were considered less affected by modern influences such as education, media, or increased mobility.

As for the focus on male speakers, one might ask: why men and not women—or at least both? In traditional societies, men were regarded as more conservative in their speech and less susceptible to change. In contrast, women were believed to adopt more prestigious forms, and thus their speech was seen as less stable for the purposes of dialect documentation (Chambers & Trudgill, 1998). Gilliéron and Edmont (1902–1910), for instance, explicitly stated that “*The ideal informant is a man, over 60, native of the village, who has never left and is unaffected by school or urban influence.*” Women were often excluded from these studies because they were thought to be more influenced by external factors such as schooling, urban contact, markets, and marriage migration. Similarly, Orton and Dieth (1962) argued that women were less satisfactory as informants, as they were more likely to adapt their speech to the socially assumed prestige norm.

2.2. Methodological Considerations

For more clarification, it is worth mentioning that dialectologists relied heavily on two primary research tools: interview and wordlists. The designed interviews were straightforward, semi-structured, including face-to-face interactions with informants, most of the time conducted at the speakers' own homes or villages in order to elicit more natural speech. Wordlists were standardized, asking speakers: "What do you call this?" while pointing at objects or images, or describing any referent, to gather and compare lexical items across regions. Researchers made sure to ask questions whose

responses were limited to a single word or phrase, avoiding complex syntactic patterns for easy and quick analysis.

After obtaining their data, they transcribed the responses phonetically using IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) to document pronunciation differences precisely. After that, they plotted these lexical or phonological variants onto dialect maps to visualize regional discrepancies and illustrate the geographical spread of these terms or sounds.

Orton and Dieth (1962) assert that "The majority of information came from direct questioning, what do you call this? How do you pronounce that?, focusing on a fixed list of items for systematic comparison." In sum, "fieldworkers worked with a fixed questionnaire... asking informants the local equivalent of each lexical item and recording phonetic features. The aim was to obtain regular, comparable data from location to location" (Chambers & Trudgill, 1998, pp. 28–29).

2.3. Methodological Constraints

Traditional dialectologists put considerable effort into their fieldwork as a first attempt to document regional variation; however, their methodology has faced trenchant criticism. The first concern is the narrow selection of informants, NORMs, who are not really representative of the whole population, which reduces generalizability. Though their focus was restricted to the purest and most conservative local dialects to fit their objective of avoiding any external influence, some scholars, such as Chambers and Trudgill (1980), came to denounce this restrictive sample and deeply criticize the overall atomistic, outdated, and decontextualized method of traditional dialectology. Their scope decontextualizes language and language use, regarding it as an independent entity removed from social dynamics. They viewed speakers as reference books, not members of intricate social structures.

As a consequence, the obtained data did not resemble in any way the speech of the majority of the population, and many young speakers no longer used or even recognized some linguistic forms because they were already in decline by the time the data was published. As a result, the plotted linguistic maps were somewhat disjointed from the linguistic reality of younger generations.

In addition to the narrow informant pool, traditional dialectologists neglected variation because of gender, age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, occupation, urban/rural regions, etc. The sampling method excluded most of the population,

particularly young urban dwellers and females. From another methodological perspective, their approach relied heavily on standardized wordlists and picture-naming tasks, where they had no consideration for pragmatics, interaction, or speech style variation and other discourse patterns. This simply implies that traditional dialectology was descriptive, not explanatory; they treated individuals as data repositories rather than social actors.

Another crucial issue to address is fatigue bias. Dialectologists depended heavily on questionnaires, which were extensive and repetitive, such as the 1,300-item survey designed by Orton & Dieth (1950s–1960s) for the Survey of English Dialects. Sometimes, interviews lasted for hours, and in other cases, their fieldwork was extended to multiple days for the same participant. Their intention was to create a comprehensive record, but that clearly affected the accuracy and consistency of the data. Due to this extended length of time, data took decades to be published. By then, linguistic patterns had already changed or were in the process of changing.

It is important to understand that this type of linguistic investigation requires precise phonetic transcription, particularly to assess vowel quality and subtle pronunciation differences. In traditional dialectology, fieldworkers were hired to transcribe informants' responses; however, they often had varying levels of training in phonetics and worked without recording equipment, relying entirely on auditory perception. This reliance on the unaided ear introduced a significant risk of transcription errors and inconsistencies. Naturally, fieldworkers did not all perceive sounds in the same way, leading to inter-observer variability as they depended on personal hearing and interpretive preferences. Furthermore, transcription had to be done on the spot, in real time, without the possibility of replaying or double-checking subtle features simply because no recording devices were available at the time.

In sum, while dialectology paved the way for the study of language variation, they failed methodologically to reflect the full complexity of linguistic reality. These shortcomings—or better said, challenges—laid the groundwork and opened the door for a more socially oriented approach to language enquiry, leading to the emergence of sociolinguistics.

Key Concepts Reminder:

Validity refers to how accurately a method or study reflects the reality it intends to investigate. If the research is based on a narrow or biased sample, it may not truly capture how language is used across a whole community.

Generalisability refers to how far the results of a study can be applied to other people, settings, or situations. If a study only includes older rural men, for example, its findings cannot be generalised to women, young people, or urban speakers—limiting its wider relevance.

3. Phase Two: Social Dialectology and Urban Turn (1960s onwards)

After the critique of traditional regional dialectology, the study of language variation entered a new phase in the 1960s, marking a shift in focus from rural to urban settings in order to better reflect real linguistic diversity and the primary impetuses of change. As a result, a new direction was initiated by linguists such as William Labov, who put more emphasis on urban speech rather than rural, social categories (such as age, gender, class, and ethnicity), utilizing a more empirical and systematic approach. In other words, whereas regional dialectologists concentrated on where the person came from (region), social dialectologists pored eagerly over the social dynamics, asking questions like: who the speaker was, their class, gender, ethnic background, and why they speak in that way.

Another crucial tenet that social dialectologists introduced, following the methodological and conceptual limitations of regional dialectology, is *structured heterogeneity*, a central concept that simply implies that variation is not random but rather socially patterned. In other words, people do not just speak differently for no reason; rather, their linguistic choices are systematically influenced by social, contextual, and linguistic factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, style, and context.

Now, how was this concept established, and what preceded it? Before the advent of this conceptualization, structuralist linguists, who generally focused on idealized and uniform systems, such as Saussure, conventionally viewed variation as a solecism in speech. However, variationist sociolinguistics led by William Labov challenged this view demonstrating that variation is substantial and governed by

rules. Labov (1969) showed that heterogeneity is a vital part of linguistic structure not a peripheral one, meaning that it is never outside the system; it is patterned, structured, and reflects social factors.

By way of illustration, Labov's landmark study of the post-vocalic (r) in New York City (1966) as in the word car, which can either be pronounced with or without an [r], revealed that the pronunciation of (r) was strongly correlated with social class: upper-middle class speakers pronounced [r] more often than working-class speakers. He also associated it with speech style, showing that the same speakers uttered [r] more frequently in careful speech than in casual speech.

Similarly, Labov's Martha's Vineyard study (1963) of the diphthong [ai] (in words like right, price, and white) found that some speakers centralized this sound, pronouncing it as [əi] instead of [ai], saying something like [rəit] instead of [rait]. He directly linked this to social identity, observing that those who used the centralized [əi] most were older fishermen and returnees to the island. They associated this pronunciation with local pride and used it to distance themselves from tourists who were changing the island's culture. In contrast, younger speakers did not exhibit the same need to express local identity, as they were planning to leave the island. As Mesthrie et al. (2009, p. 84) state, "those who favoured independence and local traditions showed more centralization, whereas those aligned with the mainland or planning to leave showed less".

For further clarification, Labov also conducted another investigation that reinforced the notion of structured heterogeneity: the examination of the pronunciation of -ing in words such as walking, going, and talking, which can take the forms [ɪŋ] and [ɪn]. He found that the use of [ɪŋ] increased with the formality of the situation (e.g., interviews vs. casual conversation), higher socio-economic class, and among female speakers, who tended to use [ɪŋ] more than males.

On account of this, this unprecedented wave of research marked a clear transition from the conventional methodological practices of traditional dialectology. While earlier approaches focused on documenting isolated items through fixed wordlists and interviews with narrowly selected participants, Labov inaugurated a more empirical framework, adopting an analytical and quantitative method of analysis. He focused on natural speech in urban settings, enquiring into how variation was structured according to social patterns, and demonstrating a correlation between linguistic forms and social variables.

Key Concepts Reminder:

Empirical: Based on real, observed speech—not theory or intuition

Systematic: Follows structured procedures for gathering and analysing comparable data

Quantitative: Involves counting how often linguistic forms appear and linking them to social categories.

Example: Labov recorded how often speakers used [r] in “fourth floor” in different NYC department stores, then analysed patterns across class and speech style.

4. Conclusion

As a conclusion, sociolinguistics is generally conceived as a dynamic and multidisciplinary field of inquiry. It derives its epistemology and methodology from linguistics, sociology, anthropology and psychology in order to explore the inextricable link between language and the social world. Its paradigms range from micro-level analyses of phonological, lexical, syntactic features of idiolects to macro-level examinations of social varieties. Sociolinguistics emphasise that studying language comprehensively cannot be achieved without reference to the social context. Apart from being a fruitful academic exercise, sociolinguistics offers an essential framework for understanding how language reflects, reinforces, shapes or even challenges social structures, identities and power dynamics. Adopting a sociolinguistic perspective allows researchers to treat language not only as an abstract system of rules but also as a living social practice, revealing that linguistic choices are never neutral; rather, they are conscious or unconscious mechanisms through which individuals build, maintain and negotiate social ties.

5. Discussion Questions

Based on what you have read so far, answer the following questions in short reflective paragraphs addressing the following tasks supporting you answer with examples when appropriate

- A. Critically evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of using NORMs as the primary source of data in early dialectological research.
- B. Discuss one major methodological limitation of the traditional dialectological approach and explain how it might affect the validity or generalisability of findings.
- C. Propose one improvement or suggest how modern sociolinguists have addressed this limitation in more recent studies.

Support your answer with examples when appropriate

6. References and Further Reading

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Language and Culture: The Interwoven Tapestry of Human Experience

Learning Objective

Upon completing this lesson, learners should be able to:

- Define the main concepts that describe the relationship between language and culture.
- Understand the weak and strong versions of the Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis.
- Recognise and analyse how cultural values are embedded in the morpho-lexical repertoire of the language.
- Explain how social relationship and collective identities are performed through language use.
- Apply the learned concepts to understand cross-cultural communication challenges.

1. Introduction: Language beyond Immediate Transactions

The textbook definitions of language represent it as a neutral tool that is used as a conduit for thoughts and feelings. It is a device with which we transact knowledge and exchange practically beneficial information. This view, referred to as **the transactional view of language**, overlooks a prominent aspect of language use, that is, our desire to interact with one another without necessarily having a practical or pragmatic purpose. When two strangers start talking about the weather, in many cases, neither is genuinely interested about obtaining meteorological information. In fact, they are more interested in starting a socially appropriate interaction. This conceptualisation of language use, often referred to as **the interactional view of language**, accounts for many features of language. For example, the use of metaphorical language, euphemistic expressions and jocular language is not explainable in terms of speakers' practical and pragmatic needs. Rather, it is the human

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innate desire to create, evaluate, maintain and negotiate social relationships that actually leads them to figure out how to express one idea in many possible ways.

A deeper examination of language reveals that language is a tool with which culture is created and, arguably, thought is generated. The transmission and sustenance of cultural values is achieved primarily through the medium of language. Sociocultural structures and linguistic structures are inextricably intertwined such that scholars dispute about which is conducive of the other.

The goal of this lesson is to guide you explore the complex connection between our linguistic behaviour (the words we say and the way we say them) and our cultural values. This lesson will help you navigate the idea of how language influences the way we perceive the world and how this world, in turn, influences the language we speak. To achieve that, a number of foundational concepts needs to be explained:

- **Culture:** a set of shared beliefs, values, practices, behaviours and even technologies and artefacts that a homogenous community uses to express, understand and interact with their world. It is essentially cross-generationally transmitted and learned rather than biologically inherited.
- **Language:** a system of arbitrary symbols and rules used by a community to share ideas and thoughts, i.e., transactions, and maintain social harmony, i.e., interaction.
- **The Core Contention:** language is not merely a **mirror** of cultural values; it is main **ingredient** in their creation. Language is used to practice cultural activities, reinforce social norms and express sociocultural identity.
- **The Cultural Lens:** some scholars argue that language is the lens through which we view the world. Reality cannot be perceived independently of language, and thought cannot be generated outside of language structures. It is, therefore, conceivable to argue that the language you speak plays a role in shaping the way you think and that two languages may offer different representations of the same observed world.

2. Language and Thought: Relation or Dictation?

One of the commonly quoted sayings of Charlemagne is “to have a second language is to have a second soul”. This saying highlights a recognition that the language you speak plays a role in the perception of the world. It is also reported that Umar Ibn Al-Khattab –may Allah be please with him– said “Learn Arabic, for it strengthens the mind and enhances noble character”. This quotes highlights a deeply rooted idea that the language you speak plays a role in both cognitive avenues and character traits. Despite the paucity of empirical evidence, this idea is remarkable recurrent in anecdotal evidence. Consider the following quote by the prominent linguist Edward Sapir:

Human beings [...] are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the ‘real world’ is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. [...] The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached. (1929, p.20.cited in Wardhaugh, 2006)

It is clear that Sapir rejects the idea that individuals perceive the world directly. Rather, they filter and construct understanding through the structures and categories of the language they speak. The outside world is perceived by Sapir as a projection of language habits, and societies with different languages have different ways of classifying, interpreting and interacting with the world. Sapir went even further to argue that these different societies do not have different interpretations of the same world. Rather, they exist in fundamentally distinct worlds.

Sapir’s ideas are echoed in his students’; Benjamin Lee Whorf holds a similar stance. Consider this seminal quote:

The categories and types that we isolate from the world of phenomena we do not find there because they stare every observer in the face. On the contrary the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which have to be organized in

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our minds. This means, largely, by the linguistic system in our minds. (1956, p. 212, cited in Kay & Kempton, 1984)

Whorf argues that the world is not similarly organised to everyone. Rather, it is a “kaleidoscopic flux of impressions” – a chaotic unstructured input. Individuals do not simply perceive ready-made categories in nature. Instead, they impose their own order. It is only through the categories that language provides (expressions of time, space, numbers, colours and kinship) that we are capable of creating an organised perception of the world. The core idea of Whorf is that the world we see is not raw but mediated through linguistic filters.

The line of thoughts that speakers of a certain language are predisposed to have cognitive and perceptual setup and that linguistic differences translate to cognitive ones is referred to as the **Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis**. It can be referred to as **Linguistic Determinism** or **The Strong Version** of Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis. Scholars often provide logical evidence to support this version of the hypothesis:

- The world is not perceived raw but through categories; these categories are represented in linguistic forms. It follows that the linguistic structures shape these categories and, hence, our perception of the world.
- Abstract concepts require linguistic representations; if different languages have different representations, it is logical to infer that speakers of different languages have different conceptualisations of abstract notions.
- Individuals fail to generate thought without language. It is, thus, reasonable to assume that the structure of the language will determine the structure of the thought.

Anecdotal evidence also provides some support for the hypothesis as some multilingual speakers report shifts in their cognitive abilities and their personalities as they use different languages. Interestingly, a number of scholars provided empirical evidence emphasising that worldview is principally dictated by linguistic categories:

- **Colour Perception:** while humans are generally equipped with the same optic setup that identify colour spectra. Studies show that different representations for these spectra. In Russian, for instance, light blue and dark blue are represented by two distinct words

(goluboy and siniy respectively). Studies show that Russian speakers are more readily capable of distinguishing shades of blue more accurately than English speakers. Researchers attributed this acquired perceptive skill to linguistic determinism.

- **Spatial Awareness:** the indigenous tribe of Kuuk Thaayorre in Australia are reported as having a unique set of terms to point out elements in space. Most language use egocentric terms such as left, right, behind and in front of where elements are located relative to the speaker/addressee. However, this tribe uses simple cardinal directions (north, south, east and west) along with complex ones (southeast, southwest, northeast and northwest). Interestingly, researchers noticed that members of this tribe, even the young ones, are exceptionally equipped with the ability to point out to the right direction, even with the absence of physical points of reference. Researchers concluded that the complex linguistic categorisation of this tribe's language enabled them to develop higher sense of direction and spatial awareness that would otherwise not be possible if their language missed this categorisation system.
- **Quantification:** it was generally believed that humans have the ability to perceive quantity due to a universal cognitive inclination to perceive differences in numbers. However, some studies show interesting counter evidence. Researchers studying the Pirahã tribe noticed that their language does not have numbers, and members of this tribe use general quantity terms such as many and few. Researchers also noticed that they are not capable of distinguishing quantity differences as they would perceive seven and ten items equally. Researchers concluded that human's ability to perceive quantity is, therefore, determined by the linguistic categories, and limitations in these categories will lead to cognitive limitations.

These interesting pieces of empirical evidence amount to the conclusion that it is only because of language that humans were ever capable of doing mathematic, geometry and architecture and it is only because of language that civilisation building was ever possible. However, researchers still acknowledge the paucity of evidence and the lack of empirically rigorous studies that prove causality. Therefore, a number of researchers modified the strong version of the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis to a weaker

version where the claim is that language does not necessarily determine thought, but it plays a vital role in influencing it generation. This version is commonly referred to as the **Weak Version of the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis** or **Linguistic Relativity**.

3. Language as a Cultural Archive

Sociolinguistics views the lexical inventory of a language not only as a set of words that assign meanings to things but also as a map that reflects a community's interests and priorities. The principle of **Lexical Elaboration** revolves around the idea that language develops rich vocabulary for domains that are culturally relevant and important for that community. The study of vocabulary is, therefore, a study of cultural values with the idea that domains that are lexically dense are of higher priority to the studies community.

3.1. Kinship Terms

To understand the kinship system of a society, one can analyse the lexical items used to express kinship ties. Relationships that are valued in the society are expressed in one word. For example, the word /ḍarra/ "fellow wife" in Arabic does not have a lexical equivalence in English. This is because this kinship tie is not recognised in English speaking community. The fact that there is a lexical item with this meaning is indicative of cultural norms of marriage in Arabic speaking communities. Moreover, the word "uncle" in English represents two kinship ties: paternal and maternal. This under-differentiation is explainable only through cultural norms. On the other hand, Arabic has two distinct representations /ṣamm/ and /xaal/, which align with how these ties are perceived. In view of that, it is reported that the Russian language changed its lexical inventory for kinship terms. In the pre-soviet rural era, the inventory was rich, having one word labels for the 'wife of brother' (nevestka) and a distinct one for 'brother of wife' (shurin). In modern Russian, these ties are expressed descriptively: brat zheny and zhena brata respectively. Wardaugh (2006, p. 231) further clarifies: "As social conditions change, we can expect kinship systems to change to reflect the new conditions. The profound social change in Russian society in the last century produced certain changes in Russian kinship designation."

3.2. Nature

In sociolinguistics, vocabulary is perceived as the voice of land. The environment is not merely a backdrop of human life. Rather, it is a fundamental force that shapes language. In many ways, language encodes the natural world of its

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speakers; it categorises it and even metaphorises its elements. Therefore, understanding the vocabulary of one language is, in a way, understanding the natural and cultural habitat of its speakers. Consider the following terms from Inuit-Yupic language:

- **Qanik:** snow as it falls
- **Aputi:** snow after it has fallen
- **Pukak:** granular and crystalline snow that is found in deeper layers
- **Maujak:** softer snow that is less dense, albeit deep

The existence of these distinct terms in this language is not haphazard. One can safely argue that speakers of this language live most of their lives in cold areas where snow is part of their daily lives. It is a priority for them to be able to differentiate different types and communicate stability and insulation to navigate their daily tasks (travel, hunting and construction) safely and effectively. In a similar fashion, it is reported that indigenous tribes in the Amazon have an abundance of lexical items related to different types of plants. This reflects an encyclopaedic knowledge of ecosystem in such a way as to meet their daily needs and reflect sociocultural priorities. These tribes are heavily dependent on this lexical richness to be able to identify sources of food, medicine, construction materials, etc. and recognise poisonous plants.

Equally important is the analysis of lexical gaps. In case a language lacks a lexical representation for a natural phenomenon, an animal or a plant, this means that these items are irrelevant to its speakers. For example, the absence of the words “avalanche”, “blizzard” or “raccoon” has significant cultural implications that sociolinguists draw conclusions from.

3.3. Metaphorical and Idiomatic Expression

The way we use language metaphorically and idiomatically is of a central importance to sociolinguistic inquiry. Consider the following expression:

- He is still **under the cloud** of doubt. (Clouds are associated with negative feelings.)
- He **stormed out** after hearing the accusation. (A storm represents anger.)
- After that problem, a **chill** settled between them. (Disagreement is cold.)

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- This is still **cloudy** to me. (Clouds are associated with negative feelings.)
- He brightened my life. (Sunshine is happiness.)

Sociolinguists argue that attitudes towards weather are encoded in idiomatic expressions. Consider the difference between these two expressions:

- "This warms my heart"

▪ "لقد أثلج صدري"

While the two expressions have opposing literal meanings, they deliver the same idea. The conceptualisation of the same idea using opposing styles is explainable only with reference to cultural values. In the same fashion, speakers of different languages use different metaphorical expressions to portray beauty, valour, honesty, stubbornness, filth, loyalty and intelligence in a way that is reflective of social, cultural and environmental settings.

4. Conclusion

The sociolinguistic perspective offer a unique account for language as a repository of societies' histories. It uses language as a framework to understand cultural nuances and inform anthropological studies. Whether language influences the world or vice versa, sociolinguistics celebrates the inextricably nuanced relationship between social structures and linguistic categories.

5. Discussion Questions

- A. Following what you have learnt from this lesson, how does sociolinguistics help you appreciate the work of skilled translators even more?
- B. Think of terms that you think are unique to your language/dialect; how can you explain this uniqueness?
- C. As a multilingual, reflect on your perception of the world, personality, cognitive skills when using Arabic and English.
- D. Can you think of any instances of misunderstanding that were caused by cross-cultural differences?

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Language Variation: Architecting Linguistics Diversity

Learning Objectives:

Upon completing this lesson, learners should be able to:

- Identify the difference between idiolect, dialect, accent and register.
- Recognise the systematicity of all linguistic varieties.
- Explain the main principles of regional variation, such as dialect continua and isoglosses.
- Understand the difference between regional and social variation.
- Describe the concepts of standard and non-standard varieties from a sociolinguistic lens.
- Identify the factors that underlie language innovation, variation and change.

1. Introduction: Variation as a Universal Phenomenon

The fundamental principle in modern linguistics is that all natural languages exist in a state of variation. As language is reflective of society and performative of social acts, it is conceivable to assume that different forms of language are used by different micro-groups in society, and different acts require different styles. There is no such thing as single “English”, “Arabic” or even “Hadzane”, which is spoken by the isolated indigenous tribe of Hadza. Rather, languages exist as a collection of typological related. One of the most common misconceptions among Arab speakers is that people in the early Islamic and pre-Islamic era spoke a uniform language “Classical Arabic”. However, the body of historical evidence confirms that different tribes and different societies used different varieties of Arabic. These varieties are characterised by phonological, lexical, semantic and syntactic differences.

Sociolinguistics treats variation not as a sign of decay or disorder but as a natural feature that is reflective of sociocultural diversity. The fundamental principle is that because societies and cultures vary, languages are bound to vary. Language

variation is, therefore, indicative of the dynamic nature of language. Through this lesson, learners are invited to explore the architecture of linguistic diversity and map out the underlying extralinguistic factors that explain language variation.

2. Conceptual Grounding

In order to understand language variation, it is important to define a number of key concepts that capture levels of variation:

- **Idiolect:** individuals speak differently. Two people who lived in the same society or even the same family and are both of the same gender and age, such as twins, still speak differently. It is often reported that people can recognise who is on the phone using cues such as voice quality, lexical choices and style. The person's unique way of speaking is referred to as **idiolect**. By virtue of being individualised variations, idiolects represent the most disperse and fine-grained case of variation. Theoretically, there are as many idiolects as there are speakers. Even at the level of the individual, an idiolect is never the same; one's experience, maturity, education and changes in lifestyle are bound to affect the way they speak, resulting in an ever-changing idiolect. Because of their idiosyncratic nature, idiolects are relevant to sociolinguistic research only as constituents of a larger social variation.
- **Dialect:** people who live in the same geographical setting or belong to the same macro-society speak in a way that is distinguishable. Their way of speaking, referred to as **dialect**, is characterised by distinct pronunciation, vocabulary and, in some cases, grammar. By definition, a dialect is a shared linguistic system that is collectively used by a community of speakers. It is important that one dialect can share significant features with another, resulting in a fuzzy boundary between dialects. It is more often than not the case that the boundary between dialects is gradual rather than clear-cut.
- **Sociolect:** the dialect is often discussed as a marker of language variation that is based on geographical background. However, it is noticed that is even with the same geographical setting, different social groups can speak differently. A person's class, occupation, education, gender, age, ethnicity and socio-economic status may be encoded in their choice of words, grammar, pronunciation and style. Differences

that are attributable to social factors are referred to as **sociolects**. Unlike dialects, which often map speakers geographically, sociolects are reflective of the speaker's position in the social structure. For example, the upper class in England used a variety (Posh) that is different from that of the working class (Cockney), and males in the urban areas of Jordan use speech that is distinguishable from that of females. Some scholars use terms that refer to subtypes of sociolects, including **ethnolect** (the variety of an ethnic group, such as **Chicano English**, spoken by Mexicans in the US), **classlect** (the variety spoken by a specific social class, such as **Cockney**, spoken by working class Londoners), **genderlect** (the variety spoken exclusively by either males or female, such as the genderlects of **Yanyuwa**, spoken in northern Australia), **edulect** (the variety spoken by the educated individuals, such as the use of MSA forms in the Arab world) and **agelect** (the variety spoken by a specific age group, such as **Verlan**, spoken mainly by young individuals in France). It is worthwhile noting that these terms are not commonly used in sociolinguistics literature. Alternatively, age-based, gender-based, ethnicity-based and class-based variations are used.

- **Accent:** the accent is perhaps the most frequently discussed aspect of language variation. People draw conclusions about speakers based on their accents as they are more readily accessible and auditorily identifiable. **Accent** refers exclusively to the aspect of pronunciation; it is a phonetic and phonological feature of speech. The same sentence can be said in different accents. Because we have easier access to phonological features of language than vocabulary and syntax, the accent is the most salient form of language variation and is the most commonly discussed level of variation among non-specialists, i.e., laymen. Received Pronunciation, Cockney, Geordie, Scouse, Brummie and Estuary English are all terms used to refer primarily to accents widely spoken in the United Kingdom.
- **Register:** it is noticed that individual adjust their way of speaking according to context, situation, purpose, audience, medium (spoken or written) and channel (e.g., phone or video call). The linguistic choices of vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and intonation are not fixed but situationally dynamic. These variations are referred to as **registers**.

For example, in formal settings such as academic conferences or job interview, speech is remarkably distinct from that in informal conversations with friends. The language used in court is significantly different from that used in medical discussions. These differences are not motivated by regional factors; rather, they are the result of speakers seeking **situational appropriateness**.

Understanding the conceptual differences between these levels of variation is crucial for the accurate operationalisation of research projects and the rigorous capturing of linguistic diversity in any speech community.

3. The Systematic Nature of Language Variation

One of the most common misconceptions perpetuated by traditional linguistics and is still actionable to date is the idea that dialects are random and unsystematic. Dialects are commonly conceptualised as a collection of random errors made by speakers failing to perform standard/correct forms. People often believe that modern dialects are the result of distortions that affected standard languages. However, modern linguistic paradigm challenge these misconceptions by providing evidence for the systematicity of all dialects. The underlying contention is that all varieties of language are equally complex, structured and rule-governed, therefore, debunking the myth of bad grammar. While this view is still contested by prescriptivist educational paradigms, it increasingly gained substantial scholarly advocacy among the linguistics community due to the overwhelming empirical evidence and the profusion of case studies corroborating these claims. The argument that non-standard dialects are “illogical” is often associated with structures such as **double negation** in the sentence “*I didn’t do nothing*” where grammarian argue that double negation is by default an assertion. However, this very form can be found in other languages’ standard varieties. For example, the French equivalent of “*I didn’t do anything*” is “*je n’ai rien fait*”, which includes a double negation using the two markers “*ne*” and “*rien*”. Therefore, sociolinguists argue that the sentence “*I didn’t do nothing*” does not lack a rule; **it just follows a different rule**.

Similarly, the Arabic dialect spoken in Djelfa and Laghout was found to have lexical placement rules that are described as follows:

Stress always falls on one of the last three syllables; the scanning for stress starts from the rightmost syllable; if it contains a heavy syllable (CVVC, CVCC, etc.), it receives stress. Otherwise, stress

falls on the penultimate syllable if it contains a CVC+ syllable. Otherwise, stress falls on the antepenultimate syllable, but never goes beyond. (Mhamedi, 2022, p. 216).

These findings challenge the perception that Arabic dialects are not grammatical and that the standard forms are the norm for correctness. This misconception is evident in the speakers' attempt to break down their dialect with reference to Standard Arabic. It is anecdotally reported that speakers would often argue over their dialect's superiority by claiming it is the closest to Standard Arabic. Conversely, sociolinguistics does not assume lineage between Classical Arabic and modern dialects and argues, based on compelling evidence, that even in previous eras, Arabic was found in variations.

On equal footing, pronunciation that mark up local dialects in the UK are highly systematic and rule-governed. For example, the Cockney accent is known for the substitution of the sound /t/ with a glottal stop /ʔ/ in words such as "water" and "better", pronouncing them as /wɔ:ʔə/ and /beʔə/. However, this substitution is neither random nor universal as it is subject to phonological constraints. For example, the words "table" and "ten" are not pronounced /ʔeɪbəw/ and /ʔen/ as glottalisation does not apply in certain contexts. When the sound /t/ occurs word-initially, there is a phonological constraint that restricts glottalisation.

The bulk of empirical evidence amounts to the following linguistics axiom: *all varieties of language, whether standard or non-standard, are equally logical, complex and systematic. They are all capable of expressing any idea and meet the needs of their speakers. The differences are in the rules, not the rigour.*

4. Regional Variation: the Sociolinguistics Predecessor

The study of language variation was first exclusively concerned with regional variations where scholars would map geographical boundaries of dialects. There was initially no references to variations within the same geographical setting. The primary research question that these scholars aimed to address was *where do people say what?* This area of study is referred to as **dialectology**. However, drawing the geographical boundaries of dialects or linguistic features came with inherent complications. It was notice that there is no clear-cut divide between dialects and geographical variations was gradual. One speaker can understand their immediate neighbouring speaker who, in turn, can understand their neighbour. It was possible that the first and the third dialects are not mutually intelligible despite being both intelligible to the second.

Differences accumulate over space, leading to gradual loss of mutual intelligibility. For example, a speaker from western Austria is reportedly capable of understanding another speaker from southern Germany. That German speaker can understand a speaker from northern Germany. However, the Western Austrian speaker cannot understand the Northern German speaker even though both can understand the Southern German speaker. In the Maghreb context, an Egyptian speaker may easily communicate with a Libyan speaker who, in turn, can easily communicate with a Tunisian speaker. However, the Tunisian speaker is not readily intelligible to the Egyptian speaker.

The idea that dialects can be mapped onto geographical glosses was challenged by actual linguistic practices. The line dividing dialects is referred to as an **isogloss**. It was practically shown that isoglosses can be used for explanatory purposes and are not equated with the lines that represent politically established boundaries. Therefore, linguists started to perceive dialect as forming a **dialect continuum** where it is not clear where one linguistic feature ends and the other begins. Isoglosses were used to map linguistic features, such as lexical items or pronunciation. Researchers noticed that some isoglosses of different features can run close together, indicating a strong dialectal boundary. They referred to the close lines as a **bundle of isoglosses**; the more intense the bundle, the clearer the dialect boundary. It was also noticed that isogloss bundles are intensified by external factors such as natural boundaries (mountain ranges and rivers) and political boundaries of countries.

5. Variations, Variables and Variants

The verb “to say” can be found in many forms in Algerian Arabic; it can take the predominant form /gaal/, which is found in most areas of the country. It can also take the form /qaal/ in some areas in Algeria, /ʔaal/ in some areas in Tlemcen or even /kaal/ by some speakers in the city of Djijel or Ghazaouet. Likewise, the third person masculine object or possessive pronouns “him” and “his” can be found in Tlemcen in two forms: /ah/ and /u/, such as in the examples “his book”, realised as /ktaabah/ or /ktaabu/, and “I saw him”, realised as /ʃuftah/ or /ʃuftu/. In sociolinguistics, the abstract concept or linguistic feature is referred to as a **linguistic variable** whereas the realisations of this variable are referred to as **linguistic variants**. The difference between a variable and a variant is that the first is abstract and has no tangible form, such as the concept of third person pronoun, whereas the second is the actual way this concept is said by the speaker. One variable can have many variants.

We talk about **linguistic variation** when the selection among the variants is not random or free but rather determined by factors. These factors are referred to as **constraints**. Sociolinguists are interested in providing a systematic description of **linguistic constraints**, such as determining the phonological conditions for glottalisation; **social constraints**, such as determining what social groups use what variants or **register constraints**, such as determining the contextual or situational conditions where one variant is more appropriate.

6. Conclusion

Language is a highly dynamic system that is closely related to the social world. Because of this dynamic nature and because society is highly diversified, language takes different forms. Language variation is very common that is difficult to imagine a language that is used uniformly across the social groups. It is a complex and structured process that is motivated by geographical, social and situational settings and driven by the intrinsic creativity of human communication. Adopting a sociolinguistic perspective means moving from prescriptive evaluations of language towards a descriptive appreciation of the true complexity of that system. Understanding socially-motivated variation helps us understand social structures and dynamics whereas understanding geographically-motivated variation enables us to link current practices to historical and political realities.

7. Discussion Question

- A. Reflect on your close friends idiolect, what aspects of language use makes them a unique speaker? Where do you think these features come from?
- B. Having seen the sociolinguistic perspective towards non-standard dialects, critically think of a structure in your dialect and provide a description of the rule that governs it?
- C. Using the concept of isogloss, how would you think the word “car” would be isoglossed on the Algerian map? How would you explain such geographical distribution?
- D. Reflect on your own speech community; describe some features that characterise genderlects, edulects or agelects. What social variable in your community do you think is the most dominant in the creation of variation?

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Language as a Social Component: the Social and Linguistic Variables

Learning Objectives

Upon completing this lesson, learners should be able to:

- Describe the principles of variationist sociolinguistics.
- Analyse the relationship between language use and social constructs, such as age, gender and socioeconomic class.
- Recognise the concepts of variables, apparent-time hypothesis and prestige.
- Evaluate the models that account for gender differences in language use.
- Illustrate how language marks membership within social groups.

1. Introduction: Language Use as a Variable

In the previous lesson, it was illustrated how earlier analysis of language were predominantly focused on how geographical background can be used to explain differences in language use. The focus in previous paradigms was **non-mobile, old, rural males** (NORMs) as they were believed to be the social group that is the least subject to language change and is likely to have preserved authentic forms of language. Contemporary sociolinguistics challenges this paradigm in three major ways:

- Social variables such as age, gender and class are equally important in explaining differences in language use as geographical background.
- All social groups' language use should be subjected to analysis, and not only that of the NORMs as the ultimate goal is to understand language as a social construct.
- The concept of **authentic language** is no longer valid as it is subjective, and it is an a priori conjecture about this group as being change-proof.

For these reasons, sociolinguistics evolved into a new, more inclusive paradigm that approaches language as a variable practice that is driven by psychological, historical, geographical and, most importantly social factors. This paradigm, **variationist sociolinguistics**, is built on the premise that speakers do not exist in a social vacuum; rather, their speech is socially meaningful and interpretable practice that signals the speaker's age, gender, ethnicity, ideology, socioeconomic class, education, and more. Because these constructs are structured, albeit inherently complex, variationist sociolinguistic posits that differences– **variations**– in language use are patterned and can be described through **systematic inquiry**.

2. The Linguistic and the Social Variables

In order for the discipline of sociolinguistic to gain **science status**, the principles of the scientific method need to be implemented. The most paramount of these principles is the clear-cut description of the subject of inquiry and the methods with which they can be capture, i.e., measured. In variationist sociolinguistics, linguistic and social variables are the primary subjects of analysis. However, these two variables are not investigated as independent entities; rather, they are approached as two complex and highly intertwined constructs. Therefore, a more common label for the subject of sociolinguistics is the **sociolinguistic variable**.

A sociolinguist, much like a sociologist, can be interested in understanding social constructs and dynamics; however, what distinguishes their inquiry is the fact they study social constructs only as underlying factors that can explain variations in language use. On equal footing, a sociolinguist, much like a formal linguistic, can be interested in studying language's phonological, morphological and syntactic structures. However, their studies are only limited to understanding how these structures can signal social affiliation.

The sociolinguistic variable is a feature of language that has two or more distinct variants, and the choice of the variant is predominantly influenced by contextual, social and stylistic factors. The variable is, therefore, an abstract concept that can be realised in two or more concrete/measurable variants. The sociolinguistic variable involves linguistic and social variables. **The linguistic variables** can involve all linguistic levels, often categorised as follows:

- **Phonological Variables:** differences between speakers with reference to aspects of pronunciation. It can be **segmental differences** (e.g., /ɹ/ vs. /q/, /q/ vs. /g/, /t/ vs. /tʃ/ and /ʒ/ vs. /dʒ/) or **supra-segmental/prosodic**

differences (intonation, lexical/sentential stress, rhythm, tempo and pitch contour).

- **Morphological Variables:** differences between speakers with references to affixes (e.g., person, gender and number affixes, possessive pronouns, tense affixes and negation affixes).
- **Syntactic Variables:** differences related to sentence structure (e.g., copula realisation, double negation).
- **Lexical Variables:** differences related to word choices (e.g., /karru:ʃa/ vs. /lu:tu/ vs. /tunubi:l/, /skaali/ vs. /droʒ/).

These are the most commonly discussed types of linguistic variables; however, it is possible to find other less common types such as the following:

- **Semantic Variables:** differences that are related to meaning choice and conceptual framing. It is a socio-cognitive or semantic-pragmatic variable. Examples of it includes the choice between euphemistic and dysphemistic expressions (/sakkar/ vs. /zajjan/ and /saraʃaan/ vs. /marð ʃʃi:n/).
- **Discourse-Pragmatic Variable:** differences beyond sentence level, related to how speakers realise different acts (e.g., salutation, apologies, requests and politeness strategies)

In order to map the social landscape of language use, which is the ultimate goal of a sociolinguist, the aforementioned variables are quantitatively and qualitatively analysed with reference to social variables. **The social variable** involves the constructs with which society can be described in terms of smaller homogenous subgroups. The comprehensive listing of all social variables is not practical as it is dictated by culture; however, the most commonly discussed ones are the following:

- **Social Class or Socioeconomic Status:** While not all societies have a system of clear-cut social class hierarchy, socioeconomic status is a universal construct that is often linked to income, education and occupation. Empirical evidence from case studies indicates that language use follows a socioeconomic hierarchy. For example, lower middle class were found to use hypercorrection (overuse of prestige forms in formal contexts); they are the most socially mobile group and are highly aware of linguistic prestige and stigma. On the other hand,

working classes often demonstrate higher use of vernacular forms and their speech is more clearly reflective of local identity and solidarity markers. The upper classes were found to more consistently use standard and supra-local– non-regional– varieties. The study of William Labov (1966) in New York demonstrates how language use is explainable in terms of socioeconomic status.

- **Age:** this perhaps is the most important variable in studies about language change. Empirical evidence and anecdotal experience reveals that speakers of different ages speak differently. This variable is, perhaps, the most commonly discussed sociolinguistic variable in non-disciplinary everyday life as speakers are highly aware of generational differences in language use. The task of sociolinguists is to indicate contexts where age is more conducive of variation by raising questions such as “are generational differences more marked among males or females, urban or rural centres, educated or uneducated social groups?” by addressing this question, sociolinguists distance themselves from the non-specialised discussion by addressing how different variables interact and work in tandem to shape linguistic behaviour. By analysing difference between age groups, we can make inferences about language change; this principle is referred to as **the Apparent Time Hypothesis**.
- **Gender:** John Gray’s book *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* illustrates the remarkable fundamental differences between males and females in terms of psychological evaluations of the world. Sociolinguistics recognises both the inherent and socially constructed differences between males and females in communication. Empirical studies showed that linguistic behaviour differences can be explained in terms of gender; prestige, innovation and linguistic awareness are all closely linked to social roles associated with males and females. Sociolinguistics also addresses questions related gender patterns, i.e., *why is gender more marked in Western societies and less marked in some social groups, such as old rural uneducated groups?*
- **Ethnicity:** Because language is a carrier of identity, speakers often express their ethnic identity via linguistic means. Members of a certain ethnic group may assert their membership by using a specific language, dialect or accent. Sociolinguists attempt at providing evidence-based

descriptions of **ethnolinguistic repertoires** by identifying the set of distinctive features associated with the variety of an ethnic group. Research shows remarkable phonological, syntactic and lexical distinctive features of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) that are explainable mainly through an ethnolinguistic lens. In Algeria, Arabs, Beni Mzab, Kabyles, Chaoui and Touareg use distinct languages, and they exercise their identity through linguistic behaviours. In Levantine countries, Kurds, Druze, Aramaeans and Domaris are distinguished by, among other things, their distinctive languages.

- **Education:** Education is a fundamental factor that shapes individual's cognitive skills. Individuals can get insight about someone's level of education just by listening to them speak. How is that possible? Sociolinguists claim that there are differences in language use between individuals that can be explained in terms of educational level. These differences involves not only thematic content but also lexical choices, phonological patterns, syntactic structures and, possibly, supra-linguistic differences such as code-switch. Brown and Yule (1983, p. 13) argue that education allows individuals to use language in its written form "which permits man to reflect upon what he has thought, has permitted the development of cognitive structures which are not available to the non-literate". The cognitive differences between educated and uneducated individuals are bound to be reflected in their use of language. This persistent question is posed by many scholars; Goody (1977, p. 124) states: "Some individuals spend more time with the written language than they do with the spoken. Apart from the effects on their own personalities . . . what are the effects on language?" Education is generally linked to socioeconomic status or social class, and speech of educated individuals is marked by higher frequency of standard variant use.
- **Occupation:** it is commonly noticed that individuals with a certain professional background have identifiable patterns of language. While this can be perceived as a micro-level social category, many sociolinguistics practitioners consider it as a manifestation of other variables such as socioeconomic status and education. It is worthwhile noting that most professions are characterised by specific terms that are

used to perform communicative tasks related to that profession. These terms may have different annotations and connotations in other contexts. These specific terms are referred to as **professional jargon**, and they are **register-specific**.

- **Social Network and Community of Practice:** sociolinguistics treats speakers not as isolated individuals with social characteristics but as nodes within a body of social ties. Sociolinguists found that the individual's social relationships have an effect on their language use. The pattern of informal relationships that an individual speaker is involved in is referred to as **social network**. Research shows that **dense, multiplex networks**, where all members know each other in multiple contexts, are linked to strong and localised linguistic norms that are often change-resistant. This type of networks is common in closed, traditional or rural speech communities. On the other end of the spectrum, **loose, uniplex networks**, where not all speakers are close and their acquaintance is limited to one context, are linked to linguistic practices that encourage innovation. **The community of practice** refers to the group of speakers who share a common interest or a mutual endeavour. For example, fans of a sports team, members of a book club or members of a gang develop a shared way of speaking that includes terms, jokes and slang. This is a communicative strategy to foster solidarity and express a shared identity.

In addition to the social variables, sociolinguists are interested in contextual/situational and geographical variables.

- **Register:** sociolinguistics are also concerned with variations in language use that are dictated by **contextual constraints**. A compelling question that sociolinguists try to answer is *how do speakers change their style and formality in different context? And why?* Empirical evidence show that **attention to speech** in different contexts is conducive of stylistic changes along a **continuum of formality**. The general principle is that the more attentive speakers are to their speech, the more formal style is. Casual speech, where attention is minimal, are characterised by the highest use of vernacular terms. This is evident in the style shift between interviews and casual chats.

- **Regional Background:** this is the main variable that is studied in traditional dialectology. Sociolinguistics built on the paradigm of dialectology and did not boycott its principle but widened their scope. Therefore, sociolinguistics takes into account variations that are attributable to geographical factors. However, this variable is not studied for the sake of mapping isoglosses; rather, the focus is on how mobility and communication network affect regional dialects, leading to **dialectal levelling** (reduction of differences) or **the actuation of new varieties**. For example, a sociolinguist in Algeria would be interested in comparing the Berber variety in geographical borders where both Arabic and Berber are spoken to the variety spoken in highly enclosed Berber-speaking regions.

3. Gender Differences: Why?

The study of gender differences in language use has gain scholarly attention from the earliest years of sociolinguistics. Generally, three models are cited:

- **The Deficit Model (1970s’):** this is the earliest and the most heavily criticised model. It is associated with the linguist Robin Lakoff in her book *Language and Woman’s Place* (1975). The model posits that women’s language is inherently deficient and inferior to men’s; it is characterised by uncertainty, weakness and lack of authority. The models frame the language of men as normative, powerful and standard whereas that of women is a deviation from the norm. Support for this model was derived from the females’ use of **hedges** (kind of, I guess), **empty adjectives** (adorable), **tag questions** (isn’t it?), **hyper-polite forms**, **rising intonation**, **intensifier** and **lack of humour**. These markers, according to some scholars, were indicative of uncertainty, lack of authority and quest for reassurance and validation. Lakoff’s model was essentially transformatism-oriented as she critiqued social inequality, but it was often associated with the deficit model.
- **The Dominance Model (1980s’):** the deficit model was heavily criticised for offering sexist account for gender variation. Later models attempted at attributing the differences to socially constructed variables as opposed to inherent gender markers. The dominance model was popularised by a number of linguists, including Don Zimmerman and Candace West (1975) “*Sex Roles, Interruptions and*

Silences in Conversation", Pamela Fishman (1978) *"Interaction: The Work Women Do"* and Dale Spender (1980) *"Man Made Language"*. This model posits that language use and gender differences are a reflection of male dominance in the social life. **Interruption, control over themes and minimal responses** are used by males to **assert authority** whereas **supportive** and **cooperative** language is used by females who assume less powerful social roles. Differences, according to this model, are not attributable to genetic differences; rather, they are symptomatic of the universally patriarchal social systems.

- **The Difference Model (1980'-Present):** the dominance model was criticised for offering a simplistic and non-comprehensive account for language use. Interpreting all gender differences from a dominance perspective risks overlooking factors such as context, cultural norms, personality and status. For instance, the males' interruption could be the result of enthusiasm and support rather than dominance. The earlier models strike a binary distinction between males and females and overlook variations within each gender. These models fail to account for why some females' speech is more dominant in some contexts. Moreover, the frameworks proposed earlier were not substantiated with adequate empirical evidence, and most of the studies were conducted on small samples. The difference model, associated with the linguist Deborah Tannen (1990) *"You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation"*, posits that males and females belong to fundamentally different **subcultures** within society. Males' subculture emphasises **report** whereas that females emphasises **rapport**. The **male transaction vs. female interaction dichotomy** explains the linguistic features that are predominant in each gender's speech. The idea in this model is that **cross-gender communication is an instance of cross-cultural communication**.

4. Intersectionality: The Interplay of Social Variables beyond Isolated Categories

The social variables illustrated above do not operate independently of on another, nor can they be found in isolation. Rather, they intersect in complex manners. The scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw developed the concept of **Intersectionality** in 1989 in his seminal paper *"Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist*

Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics", which was later adopted in the field of sociolinguistics. This term in sociolinguistics refers to the fact that a person's linguistic choices are shaped by the interaction of their gender, age, education, class, ethnicity and much more. No single social variable can be taken in isolation to comprehensively account for linguistic variation. This principle can be useful in overcoming the limitations found in some theoretical frameworks, such as the deficit and dominance models.

5. Conclusion

Language is not merely a medium for communication; it is a dynamic expressive system that we use to construct, negotiate and display sociocultural identities. It is by default a social artefact that both shapes and is shaped by the social world. The speaker's gender, age, class, education and ethnicity, to name a few, interact with their pronunciation, choice of diction and grammar. Sociolinguists seek to measure the quantifiable fingerprints that the social factors leave on the linguistic. The belief in variationist sociolinguistics is that variation is rarely random and stylistic differences are structured and socially meaningful.

6. Discussion Questions

- A. Using the social factors illustrated above, reflect on your own speech. What aspects of pronunciation, diction or grammar reflect what aspects of your social background? How does your style change when at university compared to when with family?
- B. Listen to the speech of your grandfather, father and brother. Identify patterns of pronunciation changes. How would you use the concept of apparent-time to analyse language change?
- C. Examine conversations that take place within your informal circuit (with friends or maybe classmates); pay attention to the use of "please", "sorry" and "thank you". Can you identify any differences that can be explained in terms of gender?
- D. Think of a person that you know who uses some standard Arabic language features even in their casual speech. Using the interview to collect data, identify the underlying social or psychological factors that can explain such linguistic choices.
- E. How does ethnicity influence language use in Algeria?

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Attitudes towards Languages: The Social Life of Linguistic Prejudice

Learning Objectives

Upon completing this lesson, learners should be able to:

- Define language attitudes and differentiate between what is inherently linguistic and what is socially acquired
- Explain the concept of linguistic discrimination (linguicism) and its real-world consequences.
- Identify the key factors that shape language attitudes, including standard language ideology.
- Fathom how language attitudes are reflected and reinforced in media and education.
- Analyse the methods used by sociolinguists to measure language attitudes.
- Evaluate strategies for challenging negative language attitudes and promoting linguistic equality.

1. Introduction

Language is intrinsically interwoven with social meaning, cultural identity, prestige, and power. In multilingual and multidialectal speech communities, speakers internalize a complex of beliefs, feelings and evaluative judgements concerning varieties and their speakers. These social preconceptions about these languages are known as language attitudes which are the cornerstone of sociolinguistics. The study of attitudes towards languages is a key determinant in preserving languages from death or shift.

Understanding the concept of language attitudes is a critical phase in unfolding the contributing factors behind the value and power granted to certain languages over others. Researchers explore speakers' attitudes to fathom why some language varieties are associated with prestige, education and modernity, while other codes are

recognized as inferior and not appropriate for formal settings. Such perceptions are deeply rooted in the social and political ideology of the speech community like ethnicity, nationalism, identity, power and even beauty.

In simpler words, language attitudes play a decisive role in guiding linguistic practices and preferences in addition to shaping language policies. Positive attitudes promote linguistic pride and therefore maintain minor languages from loss or decline, whereas negative attitudes contribute to language erosion and marginalization of its speech community. This implies that investigating language attitudes is a critical stage in understanding how speakers form social hierarchy and solidarity within speech communities.

2. What Are Language Attitudes

Languages attitudes are defined as the evaluative beliefs, judgments, opinions, feelings and propensities that speakers or speech communities hold towards a certain language variety or its speakers. Attitudes are not based on any inherent linguistic superiority or inferiority, but they are in every way social and cultural constructs, mirroring some social values such as prestige, power, identity and group membership. Scholars define the concept of language attitudes as follows:

- **Crystal (1997):** “Language attitudes are the opinions people hold about a language, its speakers, and the social implications of using that language in different contexts” (Crystal, 1997, p. 215).
- **Fasold (1984):** “Language attitudes encompass a set of beliefs about language expressed in terms of the social value assigned to particular speech forms” (Fasold, 1984, p. 148).
- **Baker (1992):** “Language attitude is a hypothetical construct used to explain the direction and persistence of human behaviour towards language, encompassing cognitive, affective, and behavioural responses” (Baker, 1992, p. 12).
- **Garrett (2010):** “Language attitudes involve people’s evaluations of a language or variety, often reflecting wider social attitudes towards the groups associated with that language” (Garrett, 2010, p. 23).
- **Trudgill (2000):** “The study of language attitudes examines how speakers evaluate one another’s speech, and how these evaluations affect social interaction and language change” (Trudgill, 2000, p. 83).

At its heart, the study language attitudes aims at investigating: how individuals react towards different ways of speaking, what criteria they assign to speakers and their dialect or accent (such as intelligence, friendliness, trustworthiness, beauty, logic, etc), and how these opinions influence social, political and institutional decisions and practices.

3. Importance of Studying Language Attitudes

Studying language attitudes is essential in sociolinguistics; they pave the way for a clear and transpicuous speech community as they reflect the social meanings attached to language varieties and their speakers. These predispositions have a great impact on how these languages are perceived socially and politically which in turn affect linguistic behaviour including language choice, code switching and even patterns of language shift and maintenance that may contribute to a great extent to the marginalization or decline of some varieties. Understanding language attitudes is essential for a variety of reasons.

3.1. Social Power and Hierarchies

Language attitudes are highly influenced by social power and hierarchical structures such as prestige, education, and economic advantage. Speakers often show a tendency to favour language varieties that are associated with social and economic power wich are usually those recognised as standard or prestigious, while stigmatizing non-standard or rural varieties are associated with marginalised communities. This reinforces the idea that language attitudes are not based on any inherent linguistic superiority, but are shaped by broader social ideologies and power relations (Bourdieu, 1991; Baker, 1992).

The consequences of such attitudes may not always be immediately visible, but they have significant long-term effects. In education, students who speak stigmatized rural or minority dialects are often perceived as less intelligent or less capable, which can affect their academic performance and teacher expectations (Labov, 1972). Economically, employers tend to prefer candidates who speak the dominant or prestigious language variety, associating it with professionalism and competence. This leads to linguistic discrimination (also referred to linguicism) in the job market (Lippi-Green, 1997).

For example, Speakers of urban Algerian Arabic (such as Algiers dialect) are often viewed as more “modern” and “educated” compared to speakers of rural

dialects which are sometimes wrongly perceived as “backward” or “less sophisticated. Similarly, Received Pronunciation (RP) in the UK is traditionally associated with prestige and high education, while regional accents such as Cockney or Scouse may be stigmatized in formal settings, despite having complex and rule-governed linguistic structures.

3.2. Individual and Group Identity and Solidarity

Language is deeply linked with speakers’ national and cultural identity, as it is a medium that preserves and transmits their heritage and stresses their sense of belonging. This indicates that attitudes towards a language variety are actually attitudes towards its speakers, because language is a cultural construct that conveys pride and solidarity. Therefore, marginalising or rejecting a language variety may lead to feelings of exclusion and may eventually cause language shift or decline.

A recognized example displayed in the social media is the case of southern rural varieties such the Naili dialect where many young Djelfaoui speakers tend to switch to a more urban and modern version of Algerian Arabic to sound more prestigious and to feel that they belong socially to the other northern speech communities. Older speakers, however, consider their dialect as a linguistic marker of their tribal identity and local pride, and rejecting it simply means rejecting their tribal deep origin.

Moreover, the case of Arabic and French form an illustrative model of how attitudes depend on identity dimensions where MSA is usually associated with religion and nationalism, while French is often associated with modernity and prestige in addition to the economic status of its speakers.

3.3. Macro-level Societal Planning

Macro-level societal planning encompasses patterns of language maintenance, language shift, and language policy and planning. The shared language attitudes of individuals or communities can strongly influence governmental decisions and ultimately determine the fate of a language and its varieties. This is because such institutionalised practices cannot be effectively implemented without understanding, shaping, or aligning with the attitudes of the speech community. If people view a language positively, they will support its promotion and revitalisation; however, if they hold negative attitudes, even official policies cannot ensure its survival. Therefore, language attitudes play a central role in either preventing linguistic erosion or ensuring preservation.

As an illustrative example, let’s take the case of Tamazight which is recently recognized as a national and official language in Algeria in 2016 due to the positive

attitudes held by its speakers as they regard it as a symbol of ancestral pride and identity. This enacted political modification about the language social and institutional status was not only a top-down practice but was driven by the strong positive attitudes towards this variety through activism and vast cultural movements.

Arabicization policy after independence is also representative of the usefulness of attitudes in enacting new language decisions and practices. Although Modern Standard Arabic was promoted as a marker of national unity and identity, many Algerians continued to use French in education, administration, and business due to its economic prestige. Thus, the divergent language attitudes held towards French influenced the actual outcome of this policy and limited its effectiveness and success.

4. The Roots of Linguistic Prejudice

To dive into the deep core of such inclinations and prejudices, it is pivotal to refer to the concept of the standard language, which is in its essence a socio-political construct rather than a merely linguistic one. In the field of sociolinguistics, the standard language credo is the ideology that there is one correct, formal, and superior model of a language against which other varieties are assessed and judged. This principle is driven by the powerful social status of the speakers of that language. As Milroy (2001) asserts, a standard variety is “not intrinsically better than other varieties; it is simply the dialect of the socially dominant.”

Linguistically speaking, dialects are just living forms of a mother language; they share the same linguistic roots, follow systematic rules, and remain fully expressive and meaningful. However, the standard model is considered the norm not because of any inherent superiority, but only through institutional support such as education, media, literature, and government. This leads it to gain authority, dominance, and prestige, making it viewed as the guiding form against which any other variety is judged. In other words, linguistic correctness and appropriateness is not an inherent property of the standard, but rather a reflection of the existing social hierarchy.

In this respect, there will some consequences of following this standard language ideology as speakers will perceive non-standard forms as:

- **Perception of sloppiness and laziness:** This perception stems from a fundamental misunderstanding of what language is. Perceptions of sloppiness and laziness arise because non-standard varieties are often viewed as an inappropriate, careless and lazy way of using the dialect, suggesting a rejection of conformity. In fact, this is not carelessness; it is simply a distinct

linguistic system. Non-standard dialects (such as African American English) are not broken or sloppy versions of the standard, but are equally valid linguistic systems that are stigmatized due to social inclinations, not because of their inherent value. Thus, this criticism confuses difference with deficit; it suggests that speakers of the non-standard variety are intellectually deficient for using a different grammar, pronunciation and grammar and not following the standard and dominant one. Consequently, notions of appropriateness and sloppiness are merely social judgments and serve as indirect mechanisms to reinforce social conformity and justify existing power structures..

- **Assumptions of low intelligence or education:** Non-standard forms are not a set of random mistakes; they follow a strict set of logical and complex rules that differ from the standard model, such as the case of double negation which does not distort its grammaticality or lower its social value. Moreover, non-standard varieties are often perceived as illogical, which has nothing to do with the actual logic of speech communities. Labov (1972), for instance, claims that AAVE has the same logical linguistic capacity as any other standard version; it is simply applied with variation. This clearly implies that the notion of non-standard forms being “illogical” or “without grammar” is a fallacy that reveals a great deal of bias as the listener’s unfamiliarity with the grammatical rules of the non-standard variety does not indicate a lack of intelligence or a lower level of education among its speakers
- **Belief in corruption or degradation:** Non-standard forms are usually viewed as corrupted and distorted versions of a pure language, yet if one examines this claim carefully, it becomes clear that both the standard and non-standard varieties emerge from the same earlier mother language, much like branches of the same family tree. For example, the pronunciation “ain’t”, which is currently regarded as incorrect, was once prevalent in earlier English. Thus, the myth of a pure and original language is a social construct created through deliberate, institutionally driven practices based on social values rather than linguistic facts. What individuals refer to as a perfect, original standard is merely a dialect that was selected, not because it is older or more logical, but because it became dominant and was associated with a socially, economically, and politically powerful group. Consequently, this selected variety is declared ‘correct’, while other sibling varieties

are labeled deviant, degraded, incorrect, and impure solely because they are spoken by less powerful groups. Accordingly, standard language ideology is central to understanding language attitudes because this belief system influences how individuals judge other varieties socially, intellectually, and morally, purely based on speech. Thus, the notion of linguistic purity is simply a myth used to reveal hidden social hierarchies and linguistic discrimination under the pretense of correctness and logic

5. Language Attitudes: The Hidden Bias in How We Speak

Individuals usually tend to form sudden and impulsive inclinations based on how others speak or utter certain words. Such impressions are shaped by social stereotypes and power relations.

Linguicism is a form of inequality based on language use. It is similar to racism or sexism (Phillipson, 1992), as it can lead to the unequal distribution of power between languages and the groups that speak them. For instance, a job applicant may be rejected solely because of their accent, due to the myth of a perfect, pure, and professional standard language that is believed to be superior to other versions. This kind of refusal results from the prestige that certain speech forms acquire, not because of any inherent linguistic value, but because the speakers of that variety hold social, economic, and political power and dominance.

Here are some illustrative examples that clearly display how linguistic discrimination operates and how it leads to real power divisions among speakers:

- **Job market discrimination:** People can be denied a job just because of their accent or regional way of speaking. Employers may automatically associate non-standard varieties with lack of professionalism or weak education. This rejection is not based on the applicant's real abilities, but purely on social attitudes that favour the dominant language or accent.
- **Educational penalties:** Schools are one of the strongest institutions that reinforce linguicism. Children are often corrected, mocked, or even punished for using their home dialect. Instead of valuing their linguistic identity, the school system pushes the idea that only the

standard form is correct and intellectually superior. This practice imposes shame and reinforces inequality from a very young age.

- **Media representation:** Media platforms (TV, cinema, radio, news) often assign standard accents to characters who are wise, successful, heroic, or modern. Meanwhile, regional or minority accents are given to characters who are comedic, backward, uneducated, or even morally questionable. This shapes the public mind and links linguistic forms with social status and personal worth.
- **Economic power relations:** In multilingual societies, the dominant or colonial language (like French in Algeria or English in many countries) is linked to power, prestige, and economic opportunity. It becomes the language of business, administration, and upward mobility, while indigenous varieties are pushed to informal spaces. As a result, speakers of these local varieties face limitations in job access, social mobility, and economic stability.

In this respect, language is used as a shortcut to divide and categorize speakers based on their accents, dialects and thus triggering unconscious *stereotypes* about their linguistic and social background and even their intelligence and character. For example, RP in UK is usually associated with intelligence, intellectuality, authority, elegance. Southern American English, on the contrary, is often unfairly associated with aggressive, criminal and uneducated individuals. These association are acquired and learned social constructs, and has nothing to do with linguistic veracity; they are formed and reinforced through such *socially constructed stereotypes*. For this reason, investigating attitudes is a critical phase to go through in order to manage our biases and prejudices working toward a non-discriminatory speech community.

6. Methodology in Language Attitude Research

It is critical at this level to understand the “how” question—that is, how researchers can demonstrate that individuals hold biases, whether conscious or unconscious. Interestingly, a major discovery in the study of language attitudes is that these attitudes are often subconscious or socially biased, occurring when participants provide answers they believe are socially acceptable rather than reflecting their true beliefs (also referred to as *social desirability bias*). Consequently, a variety of methodologies have been developed, from the emergence of sociolinguistics to the present day, to measure and analyze these attitudes effectively.

6.1. The Matched Guise Technique:

At the beginning of attitudes research, researchers started with the belief that participants would directly share their attitudes. After many attempts with different speakers, some participants tended to hide their biases. As a result, researchers changed the direct technique of simply asking participants about their attitudes. The first foundational, clever technique used to indirectly elicit participants' attitudes is the **Matched Guise Technique (MGT)**. This technique is considered the gold standard, as it is the most valid, reliable, and widely accepted method among researchers for revealing hidden biasing attitudes. It was first developed by Lambert, Hodgson, Gardner and Fillenbaum (1960) and has been one of the cornerstones of attitude measurement ever since.

One bilingual speaker is recorded reading a scripted passage of 20 to 30 seconds in two different varieties (e.g., English vs. French or a standard variety vs. a regional one). The researcher should use a mild deception to prevent biases in participants' answers. Participants/listeners are told that they are rating speakers on a scale (e.g., smart–stupid, educated–uneducated, trustworthy–untrustworthy, friendly–unfriendly). The magic here is that it is the same person reading, and any change or difference in ratings across guises indicates evaluative attitudes associated with the variety, not the speaker's personality. Listeners do not really know that it is the same person; they think each voice might belong to a different speaker. After the data collection phase is done, *debriefing* is crucial to inform participants about the real purpose of research as they were briefed earlier about a different purpose which is rating the person not the variety. After debriefing, they should be offered the option of data withdrawal and provided with contact information for further questions.

6.2. The Verbal Guise Technique

It is another indirect method that reveals participants' true attitudes and is similar in purpose to MGT. Unlike MGT, VGT records different multilingual speakers for each variety, not just one. Listeners rate the speakers' voices on a given scale based on social traits grouped into semantic themes such as solidarity (friendly–unfriendly), status (educated–uneducated), or pleasantness (pleasant–unpleasant). Any observed difference reflects how listeners perceive the variety, not the individual speaker. But why choose VGT over MGT? VGT is advantageous because the speaker does not have to act to sound like a native of the target variety. Finding one person who naturally speaks all target varieties is often difficult, as research prioritizes natural speech over

acted samples. Recruiting different natural speakers is also easier than having a single speaker perform all varieties. Participants should be matched in age and gender to ensure more reliable results.

6.3. Implicit Association Test (IAT)

The Implicit Association Technique was first developed by Greenwald, McGhee and Schwartz (1998), where they used this method as an indirect way to uncover the subconscious or automatic attitudes that individuals hold toward language varieties through reaction times. The core of this technique is to discover whether people unconsciously or automatically associate certain varieties with positive or negative social attributes.

First, participants are exposed to recorded voices in the varieties in question (standard vs. regional), and at the same time they see words on a computer screen that are either positive (such as professional, elegant, smart) or negative (such as lazy, ignorant, low status). Participants are supposed to quickly select the word by pressing a button (either the left or right key). This is the first round, the easy pairing:

Left Key (E): A Standard Accent + Positive words (e.g., smart, professional)

Right Key (I): A Regional Accent + Negative words (e.g., ignorant, lazy)

Here, when participants hold some kind of implicit biases (i.e., when they subconsciously believe that standard varieties are better and preferred over the regional ones), their reactions will be fast and accurate. The challenge is not at this baseline level. The technique provides another critical test where experimenters switch the pairs:

Left Key (E): Standard Accent + Negative words

Right Key (I): Regional Accent + Positive words

Now, participants are supposed to do the same task with the pairs reversed. This test reveals their hidden biases; if the person holds implicit subconscious attitudes favoring the standard variety, this new pairing creates a challenge as they fight their brains, causing a mental conflict. They will struggle to associate the standard variety with bad words and the regional variety with good words if they really hide biases. This conflict causes them to react in a slower manner and they will commit more mistakes.

In a nutshell, this technique does not really reveal what individuals think about a certain variety, but it uncovers their automatic subconscious reactions. This makes it a powerful method because automatic reactions are difficult to fake and are totally different from self-report answers. That were conducted using traditional techniques such as questionnaires or interviews. These techniques often fail to measure real language attitudes because participants may hide their true feelings or respond in a socially acceptable way. For this reason, scholars turned to indirect methods like the IAT, MGT and the VGT.

7. Weaknesses and Critiques of Attitudinal Measurement Techniques

Attitudinal analysis, although commonly accredited for practicality and implicit elicitation of data, is fraught with some ethical and methodological consideration:

7.1. Ethical and Psychological Concerns in MGT and VGT:

Specialists often point out some issues with using the Matched Guise Technique and the Verbal Guise Technique. The first issue to uncover involves the ethical problem of deceiving participants on purpose. Researchers hide the main purpose behind the study. They make people think they are just rating different speakers to reveal hidden attitudes and make the results more reliable. However, modern ethics boards in research are still sceptical about the mental effects on people in terms of informed consent and transparency which puts the whole ethical side of these methods in doubt.

7.2. Artificiality and Lack of Validity

Critics also highlight the fake and artificial data that can be elicited using MGT and VGT as participants rate very short clips of speech that lack any real context. These samples do not really show the full picture of how complex real-life communication is because, in normal conversations, aspects like facial expressions, body gestures, the topic of conversation, clothes, and even a speaker's charisma all play into how language is perceived and evaluated. These contributing elements really influence judgments about speech. However, in strict lab setups, all these elements are eliminated, for participants might focus on voice quality and vocal features of the person recorded like tone, speed, rhythm or sound quality instead of the words themselves. This procedure may lead to an oversimplification of these complex social

attitudes, reducing them to more superficial ones. This can weaken how well the results match real-world situations and thus undermine their validity.

7.3. Over-Simplification and Generalisation of Social Attitudes

Relying on these controlled measurement techniques raises more epistemological issues that are related to the basic nature of linguistic attitudes which are naturally social context-based constructs with various dimensions. MGT and VGT, nevertheless, consider these personal evaluations as stable cognitive entities that are measured in isolation. These methods adopted approach is to reduce complicated sociolinguistic views into simple numbers for the purpose of quantification and broad generalization, totally ignoring how identity, power, and real interactions play dynamic roles. As a result, such techniques only offer symbolic illustration of attitudes without really capturing how linguistic bias is manifested in actual social situations.

7.4. Critiques of the Implicit Association Test (IAT)

The Implicit Association Test faces some of the same problems as it is basically designed to spot quick hidden associations between speech varieties and social attributes. The goal is to reach implicit biases people do not consciously declare. This technique also adopts the reductionist approach where it makes linguistic attitudes too simple by turning them into speed-of-response data. The core of this technique is that quick answers are usually interpreted as markers of stronger association. However, it should be noted that reaction times can also be affected by other factors such as familiarity with certain terms, prior personal experiences. Thus, it remains unclear whether this technique is measuring a cognitive state rather than deep-seated stable traits.

8. Conclusion

. The study of language attitudes points out that language goes beyond just sounds or grammar rules but put light on language as a social entity that tells others who we are. Accents and dialects do more than just sharing facts; they reveal our sense of self, and people pick up on these cues instantly, often without conscious awareness. In a matter of seconds, they form impressions about our intelligence, level of education, social class, and even aspects of our character. Those views carry weight in the real world as they shape how we fit in or get left out from society. Still, one key fact pushes back against all that unfairness which that no accent nor dialect stands above the other inherently. Every form of talking ties back to a group's past, identity and their traditions. Tools like the Matched-Guise Test bring out attitudes individuals

might hide, highlighting that these preferences come from society, not from any real language flaws.

At the end, it is worth mentioning that maintaining equality among languages is not really a necessity, and the elimination of non-dominant varieties is also not fair. Instead, we should recognize and value these differences and variation because language ties right into who we are as individuals and into the respect we owe each other as humans. By valuing every type of language variation, we go beyond mere preservation of vocabulary, but we actively support the individuals and groups whose lives revolve around those expressions.

9. Discussion Questions

- A. Does the sociolinguistic recognition of concepts like covert prestige and implicit solidarity represent genuine resistance to inequality, or does it merely provide symbolic comfort while the Standard language continues to control access to power and resources? Support your argument with theoretical perspectives and real-world examples.
- B. To what extent do sociolinguistic tools such as the Matched Guise Technique (MGT), the Implicit Association Test (IAT), and the concept of covert prestige provide meaningful insight into actual linguistic inequality in society, rather than offering controlled, simplified representations that fail to predict real-world discriminatory behavior?

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Choice of Style: Power, Distance, and Cost of Imposition

Learning Objectives:

Upon completing this lesson, learners should be able to:

- Identify the typological stylistic differences in performing similar speech acts.
- Understand the factors that determine choice of style.
- Understand the concepts of Face, Face-Threatening Acts and Politeness Strategies in light of Brown and Levinson's model.
- Relate linguistic behaviour and communicative choices to power, distance and cost of imposition.
- Recognise the categorical description of politeness strategies in real-world discourse.
- Apply the model on examples of linguistic data.

1. Introduction

It goes without saying that language cannot be separated from the social setting where communicative interactions take place. The communicative interactions help maintain a level of social distance/closeness. The latter entails that some norms be established prior to any sort of interaction; i.e., **Norms of Politeness**.

When individuals interact with one another, they do not just engage in a process of assembling lexical items in accordance with specific structural rules. Rather, they continually make informed decisions about the choice of their linguistic style. They decide upon the level of formality required, the directness of our statements and the choice of diction. The fact that one can appropriately ask a friend "Pass me the salt?" but not use the same expression with a dinner host entails that speakers are actively engaged in monitoring not just the grammar and vocabulary of speech but also the overall stylistic choices. To a dinner host, a speaker may alternatively decide to use the expression "I'm sorry, could I possibly trouble you for the salt?"

Understanding the underlying reasons behind the changes of style lies not in understanding grammar and syntax. Rather, it is only through a sociolinguistic lens that such nuances are explainable. This lesson explores a compelling sociolinguistic model that offers a systematic account for variations in stylistic choices.

2. Conceptual Grounding

Politeness is highly society-specific. In the Japanese speech community, for example, politeness norms are encoded in its syntax; the verb changes its form “conjugation” depending on whom we are addressing “honorific forms” (Meyerhoff, 2006).

Politeness: actions [emphasis added] taken by competent language speakers [emphasis added] in a community in order to attend to the social or interpersonal disturbance [emphasis added]. For example, euphemism is a form of politeness that is encoded in the lexicon (Meyerhoff, 2006, p. 293).

The definition provided above highlights that politeness is a **speech act**. It is a reactive and proactive measure that individuals take to establish, maintain and negotiate social relationships. By “competent speakers”, we refer to communicative competence where speakers possess procedural knowledge at the following levels:

- **Linguistic competence:** knowledge of vocabulary and language structure (also known as Chomskyan Competence)
- **Discursive competence:** knowledge of organisational markers, logical sequencing, coherence and cohesive ties
- **Strategic competence:** knowledge of conversational and turn-taking norms, interruption management, etc.
- **Sociolinguistic competence:** knowledge of cultural norms of communication, including

3. Theories of Politeness

The speaker is perceived as the main linguistic agent planning and evaluating the speech in a speech event. Therefore, the speaker has been central to the analyses of politeness. Some newer frameworks of analysis focus also on the addressee’s wants and desires in addition to the demands of their social groups. Amongst the many

theories dealing with politeness in the human interactions, **Brown and Levinson's** is the most prominent.

In 1987, Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson published a seminal book entitled *"Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage"* where they argued that being polite does not merely being "socially nice". Rather, it is a fundamental principle of human interaction that is driven by awareness of one's and others' "face". They propose that deferential responses and joking responses can both be indicative of "politeness". In this context, politeness is not defined dictionaryly. Rather, it means "socially appropriate language acts".

In their framework, politeness can be defined with **linguistic style**, which involves the conscious and unconscious selection of a particular way of speaking from a range of possible options. It is, therefore, a strategic choice of language variations that is mediated by context, addressee, audience and communicative purpose.

3.1. Face and Face Wants

One of the fundamental concepts in Brown and Levinson's model is the notion of **Face**. The concept of FACE was introduced in the work of Erving Goffman (1955). It refers to the quality or attribute that each of us is trying to protect "self-image". It is a perception that an individual speaker builds for themselves and wishes to be perceived by others accordingly. Therefore, individuals have **face wants** (how they want to be perceived by others). Brown and Levinson divided face wants into **positive** and **negative** ones. It is important to note that "positive" and "negative" are not indicative of "good" and "bad". Rather, they are used as neutral terms that indicate social polarity in the same way that scientists use them to refer to magnetic **attraction** and **repulsion**.

- **Positive Face Wants:** the person's desire to gain membership/ closeness with the speaker. It is the desire to be liked, admired and ratified. It is the person's need for social approval and belonging. It emphasises the need to be treated as an **in-group member**.
- **Negative Face Wants:** the person's desire to be autonomous and free from imposition. It is the desire not to have their actions impeded by others. It emphasises a need to be treated with **deference**.

Societies differ in their social distance, some pay attention to positive face wants and others to negative face wants. **Collectivist** societies tend to place more emphasis

on positive face wants where in-group membership is the predominant marker of social ties. On the other hand, **individualist** societies place more emphasis on negative face wants where deference, distance and formality are prioritised over friendliness and closeness. These norms are highly dynamic and are mediated by other factors, such as age, gender, class, etc.

3.2. Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs)

Brown and Levinson suggest that when individuals interact, they perform speech acts that inherently influence (they used the term threaten) the face wants of either the speaker or the addressee. They referred to such acts taking place in conversational events as **face-threatening acts**. For example, if the speaker makes a request, this act threatens the addressee's negative face wants. That is, the addressee's desire to have their actions unimpeded is affected by this request. Therefore, request is an **inherently face-threatening act**. Brown and Levinson (1987, pp. 65-68) offer examples of face-threatening acts. These examples are illustrated by Meriam Meyerhoff (2006, p. 90) as shown in the following table:

Whose face is threatened	Type of face threatened	
	Negative face	Positive face
Addressee	Orders, requests, threats, warnings, advice, reminder	Disapproval, criticisms, disagreements, complaints
Speaker	Thanking, promising, accepting apology	Making an apology, Showing lack of (physical or emotional) control

It is worthwhile noting that not all FTAs are equal in the sense that the effect of some is noticeably more prominent than others. For example, an insult is inherently more face threatening than a request. To understand the table above, think of any speech act and consider the following:

- **Hearer's Positive FTAs:** acts that suggest that the speakers does not pay attention to the hearer's self-image
- **Hearer's Negative FTAs:** acts that impose on the hearer's autonomy
- **Speaker's Positive FTAs:** acts that imply that the speaker violated social norms or acknowledge a flaw in the speaker

- **Speaker's Negative FTAs:** acts that commit the speaker to a future action, thus impeding their autonomy

These acts of speech are **inherently** face-threatening. This means that regardless of how the speaker performs them, there is an inevitable influence on the positive/negative face wants of the speaker/addressee. In view of that, the fundamental question that Brown and Levinson try to answer is "how are speakers capable of performing such acts while maintaining social harmony?" In other words, "how do speakers perform these acts while minimising their effect?"

3.3. Power, Distance and Cost of Imposition

The answer to the questions above can be illustrated through a sociolinguistic lens. Interlocutors have at their disposal an array of linguistic possibilities; from which they choose appropriate forms. The process of evaluating the context, the audience and the purpose along with the choice of the linguistic medium is referred to as the **politeness strategy**. Being communicatively competent entail adequate knowledge of possible linguistic variations that perform the desired act and awareness of the speaker's and addressee's face wants.

The choice of the linguistic medium will define the chosen strategy. **Positive politeness strategies** occur when the act is performed in a manner that emphasises friendliness, closeness and in-group membership whereas **negative politeness strategies** occur when there is an emphasis on deference, formality, distance and independence. The idea is that neither one is inherently more appropriate or more polite. Rather, it is context that defines the appropriateness of the chosen strategy. Successful communication happens when the speaker chooses the strategy that aligns with addressee's face wants and the society's norms of communication.

It is also worthwhile noting that the same act can be performed using either strategy. For example, the act of "request" can be performed using a positive strategy "*honey, give me the pen.*" Or a negative strategy "*would you please give me the pen if it is not much of a trouble?*" Traditionally, we would consider the second strategy as more polite; however, Brown and Levinson's model offers a new perspective: **it is all context-dependent**. The second example can be inappropriate if the conversational event involves two very close friends or a husband and a wife.

The model of Brown and Levinson suggests that speakers constantly mediate their speech and **mitigate** the effect of the FTA, i.e., reduce its impact on the addressee, by evaluating three key variables: power, distance and cost if imposition.

- **Power:** it is the relative vertical difference between the speaker and the addressee. It is a measurement of authority and social status. A boss, a father or a teacher, for example, are placed higher in the power scale than an employee, a son or a student, respectively. The greater the power the addressee has over the speaker, the more likely it is that the act will be performed using a negative politeness strategy.
- **Distance:** it is the horizontal level of familiarity and solidarity between the interlocutors. It is a measurement of acquaintance and closeness. The closer the addressee is to the speaker, the more likely it is that the act will be performed using a positive politeness strategy.
- **Cost of Imposition:** it is the weight of the FTA. For example, asking to borrow someone's pen during an examination is intrinsically more imposing than asking for directions. Acts that are more imposing/costly are likely performed using negative politeness strategies.

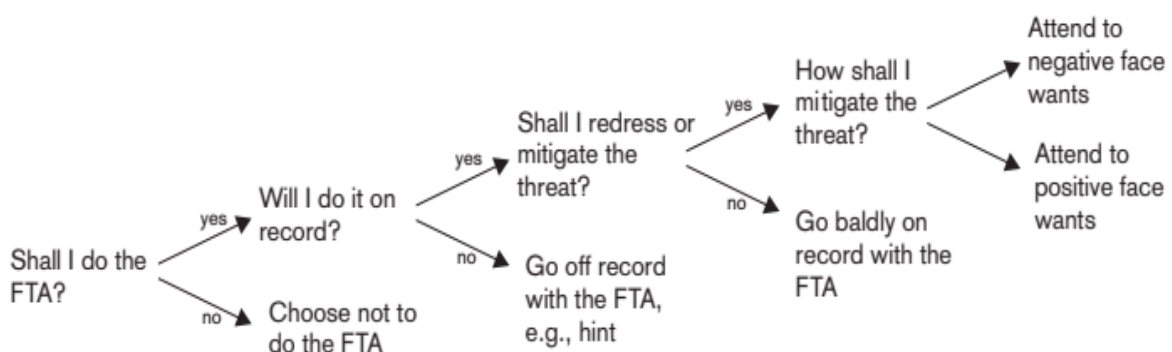
It is worthwhile noting that these variables do not act independently of each other. Rather, each serves as precursor for the other: relative differences in power and distance will determine cost of imposition; closeness may reduce the effect of power; low cost of imposition may cause power and distance to be inoperable, etc.

3.4. The Hierarchy of Politeness Strategies

Some variations of speech act performances are remarkably more marked with positive/negative strategies. For example, the example "*would you please give me the pen if it is not much of a trouble?*" employs a strategy that emphasises deference more significantly than the example "*would you please hand me the pen?*" even though both are negative politeness strategies. Likewise, the example "*my dear, give me the pen.*" emphasises closeness in a way that is less than "*give me the pen*" where the speaker judged the addressee so close that they did not feel the need to mitigate the act. Therefore, politeness strategies are not dichotomous; rather, they are hierarchical. Some negative strategies are 'more negative' than others and some positive strategies are 'more positive' than others. It is power, distance and cost of imposition that dictate not only what strategy surfaces but also how much mitigation is involved. Generally, all politeness strategies, whether positive or negative, can be described in terms of the following hierarchy:

- **On-Record (also called “Bald”):** here, the speaker performs the act without any mitigation or redressive action. It is used when power, distance and cost of imposition are very low. This is considered as a type of positive politeness strategy. Example: *“Close the window.”*
- **Positive Mitigation:** here, the speaker takes active measures to address the addressee’s positive face wants, such as using endearment terms or nicknames. This is considered as a type of positive politeness strategy. Example: *“Honey, close the window.”*
- **Negative Mitigation:** here, the speaker takes active measures to address the addressee’s negative face wants, such as using formal language, hedging or saying “please”. This is considered as a type of negative politeness strategy. Example: *“Would you please close the window?”*
- **Off-Record (Hinting):** here, the speaker depends on the addressee’s ability to infer the act; they hint to the act rather than saying it directly. This is considered as a type of negative politeness strategy. Example: *“It is very cold in here. Isn’t it?”*
- **Not Doing the FTA:** here, because the power and distance are immense, the cost of imposition becomes very high such that the speaker decides not to do the FTA. This can be considered as a type of negative politeness strategy.

The speaker constantly makes informed decisions regarding the strategy to use depending on their evaluation of power, distance and cost of imposition. This process is illustrated in the following figure (Meyerhoff, 2006, p.93):



Using Brown and Levison's model, sociolinguists manage to explain a large number of everyday interactions, such as when an employee says to the boss: *"I was wondering if you might have a moment to review my proposal, if you are free course."*

It is worthwhile noting that the application of strategies has cultural implications. For example, in many Middle Eastern communities, more emphasis is placed on positive face whereas in Northern European cultures, negative face is more attended to. Therefore, communicative styles can vary in terms of directness and expressiveness. What is considered rude in one culture (e.g., directly saying no in Japan) can be embraced in another (e.g., Germany). The variables discussed earlier are culturally calibrated and power/distance spectra are shaped by cultural norms.

4. Conclusion

The model discussed in this lesson offers a powerful and systematic way to understand why stylistic choices differ. Through its discussion of variables, it shows how linguistic behaviour realises interpersonal relations and indicates social ties. Through interplay of power, distance and cost of imposition, speakers strategically navigate linguistic possibilities and determine whether and how redress face-threatening acts, thus, contributing to the maintaining of social equilibrium. The model highlights the remarkably active role of the speaker and the central role of the addressee in establishing conversational norms in both casual conversational events and formal institutional discourse. It demonstrates the profound social intelligence and sociolinguistic competence underlying daily communicative encounters.

5. Discussion Questions

- A. Some scholars levelled criticism against Brown and Levinson's model arguing that it is more fitting with Western Individualist communities. Do you think this model is applicable to your community's norms of interaction?
- B. Can you think of any examples where the spontaneity of interaction overpowers rational calculations of power, distance and cost of imposition?
- C. How do you think gender differences can be integrated in this model?
- D. Go back to a recent email that you sent to a teacher. Analyse the speech acts in the email using the model of Brown and Levinson.

- E. Think of a communicative breakdown that you witnessed. How can this breakdown be accounted for using the principles of this model?

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Code-Switching and Lexical Borrowing: Navigating Linguistic Repertoires

Learning Objectives

Upon completing this lesson, learners should be able to:

- Provide contrasting definitions for code-switching and lexical borrowing.
- Identify the different types of code-switching and recognise the grammatical constraints.
- Understand the social and pragmatic factors that motivate code-switching.
- Analyse the process of lexical borrowing between languages.
- Analyse examples of real data and differentiate between code-switching and lexical borrowing.
- Relate these phenomena to other social constructs such as attitudes and identity.

1. Introduction: the Multilingual Reality

The general perception is that the majority of the speakers are monolinguals; however, it is more often than not the case that communities include more than one language or language variety. Therefore, multilingualism or multi-code use is the norm, not the exception. Because of this linguistic reality, a number of fascinating language-related phenomena arise, resulting from multilingual knowledge and contact. When the social, linguistic and historical boundaries between communities are fluid, these phenomena intensify, capturing the essence of sociolinguistic dynamics. Among these phenomena, **code-switching** and **lexical borrowing** are, perhaps, the most frequently discussed.

At first encounter, code-switching and lexical borrowing may appear similar at the surface level as they both include using another variety or language; however, there are substantial differences between them as they stem from different processes

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and serve different functions. Therefore, this lesson aims at exploring the forms, functions and social implications of mixing linguistic codes. Through this lesson, we aim to establish an understanding that using another code is not simply attributable to linguistic deficiency; rather, it is a strategic intricate communication tool.

2. Conceptual Grounding

Prior to the engagement in the theoretical underpinnings of code-switching and lexical borrowing, a curated number of core concepts need to be grasped. These concepts are frequently discussed in the literature and constitute the conceptual territory of research in code-switching and lexical borrowing:

- **Linguistic Repertoire:** the totality of languages, dialects or styles that a speaker knows and can use to communicate in their community.
- **Language Contact:** a sociolinguistic situation where speakers of different languages or dialects interact regularly. It is often led by multilingual speakers, leading to linguistic influence and convergence at all linguistic levels.
- **Code-Switching:** the discursive strategy through which a speaker alternates between two or more languages or varieties, i.e., codes, within a single conversational stream— the same sentence, clause or phrase, depending on the situational and communicative context of the speech event.
- **Lexical Borrowing:** the long-term linguistic process by which one variety adopts lexical items, words or expressions, from another and fully integrate it in its lexicon, often to fill lexical gaps, express prestige and/or achieve communicative goals.
- **Loanword:** a lexical item that is adopted from one language and incorporated into another. Often, loanwords are subjected to the phonological and morphological adaptations so that to converge with the system of the receiving language.
- **Calque (also called Loan Translation):** a type of loanwords where the meaning of a lexical item is translated directly into the receiving language (*skyscraper* → *gratte-ciel*, *money laundry* → غسيل أموال).
- **Nativisation (also called Integration):** a process that is closely linked to lexical borrowing through which the borrowed item is subjected to

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structural and semantic adaptations in order to conform to the system of the receiving language.

- **Donor Language:** the language from which the loanword or calque is borrowed.
- **Recipient Language (Host):** the language that received the loanword and nativised it into its system.
- **Borrowability:** the degree to which one abstract item is likely to be borrowed from one language to another. For example, technology-related meaning items have higher borrowability than body part related items; likewise, function words have lower borrowability than content words.

Defining these terms is not a matter of mere theoretical exercise; it is an essential component that lays the groundwork for exploring the dynamic interplay between contact languages. Each of these concepts feeds into the broader understanding of language exchange and multilingual linguistic behaviour. A number of natural questions follow this conceptual grounding:

- *How can we tell the difference between code-switching and lexical borrowing when we observe them in real communication?*
- *What is the basis for the distinction?*
- *What theoretical or practical benefits arrive from this distinction?*

3. Code-Switching Beyond Random Mixing

One of the common misconceptions is that speakers shift between codes in a way that is random, haphazard and unpredictable. Sociolinguistics, however, offers an alternative perspective where code-switching is framed as a rule-governed practice where speakers are fluent in both languages and is guided by grammatical constraints.

3.1. Types of Code-Switching

One of the criteria of categorising code-switching is the point where the switch occurs. Here, we recognise four types:

- **Tag-Switching (also called Emblematic Switching):** this type of switching involves the insertion of a tag phrase, word or a discursive

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filler from another language. This type is very common and can be found in utterances such as “*I’ve done my best, wallah!*”

- **Inter-sentential Switching:** in this type, the switch occurs at a clause or sentence boundary. The speaker completes a sentence or clause in one language and switches to the other language in the next. This type mostly includes a relatively more conscious practice and can be found in utterances such as “*keep working on it.*” *راني جاي.*
- **Intra-sentential Switching:** in this type, the switch occurs within the same sentence or clause such that the boundary between the two codes is fuzzy. This type is very complex as it requires higher levels of proficiency in the two codes; it involves intertwine between the grammars of the two codes. Examples of this type can be found in utterances such as “*l’examen final* قبل *rapport de stage* ال لازمى نوجد ال”. The difference between lexical borrowing and intra-sentential switching is often not clear to novice researchers and students.

Regardless of the type of code-switching, the general idea is that code-switching occurs at a point in the utterance where the surface structures of the two languages align. This is referred to as **the Equivalence Constraint** (Poplack, 1980), which is a grammatical principle that prevents ungrammatical mixtures. For example, some languages have the adjective before the noun it modifies whereas in other languages the noun precedes the modifying adjective; the switching here does not happen as we do not find the phrase “*la casa white*” or “*the blanca house*” as code switches. Therefore, code switching occurs when the order in the two languages is the same.

The types discussed above are based on the **taxonomy of surface structure** where the position of the code determines the type. Researchers also distinguish types of code-switching based on the **taxonomy of pragmatic function**. Here, we recognise two types, **situational and metaphorical code-switching**:

- **Situational Code-Switching:** this type of switching occurs as a result of changes in the situation. When the speaker meets a new person or when they are discussing a new topic, this sometimes motivates the use of a new code. The choice of the code is determined by the social and situational norms and the two codes are used in a complementary, non-overlapping manner. For example, the teacher is talking to their student in English; suddenly, they pick up the phone and start talking

in Arabic to their mother. This type of code-switching requires a high level of proficiency in both codes.

- **Metaphorical Code-Switching:** in this type, the switching occurs without any situational motives. Rather, the speaker uses a new code to redefine the situation. It is not a socially-imposed communicative strategy; rather, it is a rhetorical device that capitalises on the associations and connotations of different codes. Speakers use this type to evoke a particular tone, emphasise a point, express identity or capture attention. It is also called **conversational code-switching**. Imagine a client asking for refunds and their request gets reject; they start talking in French because they wish to invoke some socially defined associations with this code. Also, imagine that a person is mocking their boss and say: *"he is so phoney; they'd be 'bon jour madame'"* Here, the switch to French is used as a rhetorical devise that adds authenticity to the mocking. This type of metaphors also occurs when the speaker is trying to sound more prestigious, intelligent or convincing based on the social meanings associated with the chosen code.

3.2. Code-Switching as a Strategic Choice

The speaker's choice to switch from one code to another can be explain through **grammatical constraints**; however, sociolinguistics acknowledges that the motivations are purely **functional**. This view is reflected in Myers-Scotton's Markedness Model (1993) who posits that speakers choose the linguistic code based on the expected (**unmarked**) or unexpected (**marked**) **social meaning or value (markedness)** in a given communicative situation. In any conversational event, there is socially constructed set of **rights and obligations** that define how interlocutors interact and relate to one another. Communication in different codes is, hence, a way of signalling **perceived relationships** and **intentions** within that social context.

- **Unmarked Choice:** it refers to the expected or neutral linguistic choices– whether lexical, phonological, stylistic or code-related choices– that are expected or neutral in a given communicative event. It is the conventional or typical code used in that situation. In an Algerian EFL classroom, English is the unmarked code choice.

- **Marked Choice:** it is the deviation from the expected communicative norm; this deviation is used intentionally by speakers to signal a specific meaning. These meanings can be rhetorical (persuasive) or social (solidarity, authority, rebellion or distance). For example, a teacher in an Algerian EFL classroom suddenly uses colloquial Arabic, the marked choice, to tell a joke and break the ice during teaching.
- **Exploratory Choice:** In addition to the marked and unmarked code choices, speakers often proactively use an **exploratory code** where they use a specific code in order to **test** the response they receive, especially when the communicative norms are not clear to the speaker. For example, a student may alternate between Arabic and English when addressing their teacher outside the classroom to see what code would be favoured.

The model offered by Myers-Scotton captures code-switching as a highly structured and **strategic linguistic behaviour** through which speakers exercise their identity, signal social affiliation and gauge positionality within the social world.

3.3. Motivations for Code-Switching

One of the fundamental questions that sociolinguists try to address is “*why do speakers switch codes?*” The examination of actual instances of code-switching shows that the choice of code can be motivated by a range of linguistic, sociocultural and psychological factors. The motivations can be summarised as follows:

- **Topic Appropriateness:** multilingual speakers sometimes believe that certain topics, ideas or concepts are more appropriately/conveniently expressed in one code rather than the other. Therefore, they make constant code adaptations, especially when specialised vocabulary is required. For example, Algerian EFL students may talk in Arabic to each other, but when they start talking about their studies, they start using English or French.
- **Quotation:** this is a very common motivation for code-switching as speakers sometimes choose to preserve the language originally used to make their speech more authentic. For example, a student informing his classmates “*is the deadline* الأستاذ قال الخميس”

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- **Emphasis and Clarification:** switching codes can have an emphatic and clarificatory use. For example, a teacher says to their students “listen very carefully this time; هذي آخر مرة نعاودها”. This is an emphatic use of code-switching. Clarificatory use can be exemplified by the following: “submit the assignment before the break, قبل العطلة”.
- **Emotional Load:** sometimes, strong emotions are better conveyed in another code. For example, EFL speakers reportedly use the word “please” and “sorry” in their casual speech.
- **Solidarity and In-Group Membership:** considering that dialects and accents are also codes, speakers often make changes to their speech to signal membership with the addressee by speaking their dialect or language. For example, an English speaker may use words such as “مرحبا” to signal solidarity or intimacy with the Arab addressee. As a teacher of English, some members of your family or colleagues from other specialities may jokingly insert English words into their speech; this is used as a strategy to strengthen bonds and express friendliness.
- **Prestige and Status:** colonial languages are often associated with higher social prestige and their speakers assume higher social statuses. Speakers often use these codes to appear more educated, prestigious or cosmopolitan. This motivation is very frequently cited in sociolinguistics literature discussing Algerian communities.
- **Lexical Need:** in many cases, resorting to code-switching is motivated by a **perceived** gap in the lexicon of one language. The word perceived is highlighted in order to assert that the gap may only be in the mind of the speaker. For example, an EFL teacher may use Arabic to express word or phrase that they fail to find their counterparts in English. For example, “Writing is a skill; you need to avoid الإقلال المخل والإطناب الممل”.
- **Audience Design:** depending on the linguistic background of the interlocutors (known, ratified or addressed), speakers may choose different codes to include or exclude members of the audience. For example, two Mzabi interlocutors decide to switch to Arabic in the presence of a non-Mzabi speaker in order to signal intimacy. It should be noted that these motivations can work in tandem. For example, in a thesis defence session, a jury member decides to share their positive feedback in Arabic (to express solidarity and save face of the candidate)

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and their negative feedback in Arabic in order (to include the non-English speaking audience).

- **Style and Rhetorical Effect:** different codes are associated with different connotations: humour, irony, dramatic effect, argumentation and emotional load. Therefore, speakers can use different codes to achieve different stylistic and rhetorical effects. For example, “*you think I am lying; والله I am not*”.

The lesson so far illustrates that code-switching is a linguistic phenomenon that mirrors multilingual proficiency and the society-language interaction. It is a noteworthy linguistic behaviour that shows how contact between languages manifests at the level of the **individual’s linguistic behaviour**. Equally important are other phenomena, such as lexical borrowing, where language contact leads to **more permanent** changes at the level of the **collective linguistic behaviour**.

4. Lexical Borrowing

One of the universal processes that stem from prolonged language contact is that by which one language adopts and incorporates lexical items from another. While code-switching is a performance-specific temporary act, borrowing is more permanent and rearchitectures the lexical inventory of the recipient language. The English language has a significant number of items that are borrowed from other languages as shown in the following table:

Donor Language	Loanwords
Arabic	admiral, adobe, alcohol, algebra, apricot, arsenal, artichoke, assassin, candy, cotton, jasmine, lemon, safari, sofa, syrup, tariff
French	absorb, accent, accident, acid, adjust, ball, bank, beige, capsule, captain, decline, denote, divorce, ensemble, figure, friction, furniture, magazine, muscle, torture, vague
Italian	arcade, balcony, ballerina, bandit, bizarre, broccoli, cannon, cappuccino, caravan, cartoon, escalator, espresso, incognito

The words in the table above, taken from the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, illustrate that languages adopt words from one another. In many cases, prolonged contact is more determinant of borrowing than genetic lineage. The resulting loanwords differ in terms of their **degree of integration** in recipient language:

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- **Non-Assimilated Loanwords:** these words retain their original form and are visibly “foreign”. Generally, these words are italicised in writing. For example, “cultivating good manners is the primary school’s *raison d’être*” or “they hired a Japanese *au pair* to look after the kids”. Other examples include *vice versa*, *per se*, *status quo*, *prima donna*, *fiesta*, *déjà vu* and *doppelganger*.
- **Phonologically Integrated Loanwords:** these words are pronounced according to the norms of the recipient language but can still be detectable as “foreign”. Examples of these include *café*, *genre*, *tsunami*, *piano* and *opera*.
- **Fully Integrated Loanwords:** these words are morphologically integrated into the recipient language such that they take the same grammatical inflection of non-loanwords. They are not detectable as “foreign” and require some knowledge of etymology to be labelled as loanwords. Examples of these include *chair*, *street*, *school*, *alcohol*, *dance*, *very* and *orange*.

While these types are the result of a classification on the basis of structural integration, they can also be perceived as phases in borrowing. There are two overarching factors that motivate borrowing: necessity and prestige. The necessity motive involves a process of filling lexical gaps and meeting the expressive demands of the speakers. On the other hand, the prestige motive involves a stylistic adaptation that aligns with the socially assigned weight of loanwords.

4.1. Necessity as a Key Driver for Lexical Borrowing

Language is the primary tool used for social interaction; it both shapes and reflects the social world. Changes in the social world are met with re-adaptations in language structures. Therefore, necessity is perceived as a major driver for lexical borrowing. It is a straightforward principle: when a language lacks a word for a concept, the most efficient solution is to borrow it from another language. These concepts generally revolve around the following:

- **New Objects and Technology:** research shows that the semantic field of technology is the most subject to lexical borrowing. New inventions require labelling, and borrowing technologies is accompanied with borrowing their labels. In an analysis of 19 languages, it was found that the percentage of loanword items ranged between 58% and 98% (Ibrir,

2023, p. 185). When new foods, drinks, cultures and products are introduced to a society, they are labelled in accordance with the native form. Examples of these items include sushi, *shawarma*, *croissant*, *coffee*, *robot*, *internet*, *karaoke*, *emoji* and *animé*.

- **Concepts and Abstractions:** when a society adopts a new philosophical or religious doctrine, the concepts are adopted along. Borrowing, here, ensures preservation of meaning. Examples of this include *karma*, *nirvana*, *hijab*, *jihaad*, *qibla*, *fatwa*, *imam*, *angst*, *glasnost*, *perestroika* and *apartheid*.
- **Technical Precision:** when speakers of one language are introduced to specialised fields, they are exposed to domain-specific vocabulary. When these fields are carried over to their society, the vocabulary retains its original form, thus, becoming loanwords. Mechanics in Algeria, for example, use French loanwords to refer to almost all car parts and tools.

4.2. Prestige and Stylistic Effects as Motives for Borrowing

The **deficit model** treats borrowing as a process that fills lexical gaps only. This stance aligns with the **transactional view** of language where language is perceived as a tool to exchange information. However, sociolinguistics recognises the **interactional use** of language as individuals use language not only for expressing ideas but also to map themselves in the social structure. In many cases, borrowing occurs not because the recipient language lacks a lexical equivalent but because the loanword is associated with more prestigious social meaning. This type is referred to as **luxury loan**; it is motivated by social and psychological rather than linguistic factors.

- **Perceived Prestige and Sophistication:** luxury borrowing may occur when the donor language/culture is perceived as a more defined, advanced and prestigious alternative. Speakers use the loanword to appear more educated or to affiliate with higher status groups.
- **Euphemism and Political Correctness:** speakers sometimes resort to loanwords to reduce the semantic and pragmatic load of the otherwise non-loanword. When talking about taboo or embarrassing topics, speakers may use loanwords as they carry less emotionally charged meaning. For example, when talking to a doctor, speakers feel less embarrassed when using terms in French.

- **Academic and Intellectual Authority:** some speakers use loanwords in their arguments as they perceive that they give their discourse more rhetorical weight. This is comparable to metaphorical code-switching where the desire to be persuasive drives language use. For example, using the words *الإثنية*, *المورفولوجية*, *إيديولوجيا* can be used not for their semantic content but because they communicate intellectual authority and competence.

In addition to these two motives, loanwords can be used to achieve **linguistic efficiency and convenience**. Sometimes speakers use loanwords because they believe they fill a subtle gap and add a fine layer of meaning that the native term does not capture. Loanword can be used for their brevity and convenience. For example, the loanword *بيروقراطية* is structurally shorter than the non-loanword *سلطة المكتب* and the expression *déjà vu* captures a meaning that cannot be expressed using the length alternative “*a strange feeling that you have already experienced something that is just happening*”.

5. Distinguishing Borrowing from Code-Switching

At their surface structures, code-switching can be mistaken for borrowing as both involve the use of non-native forms and they can both be motivated by communicative, psychological and social factors. Both processes arise from language contact and can lead to language change. However, researchers make a clear-cut distinction between the processes and the products of these phenomena in terms of nature, frequency, integration and speaker awareness as illustrated in the following table:

Feature	Code-Switching	Borrowing
Nature	Discursive and contextual strategy	Historical and linguistic process
Frequency	Less frequent, depending on the speaker and context	Very frequent, conventionalised
Integration	Not integrated and both grammars are preserved	Integrated into the recipient language
Linguistic Competence	Used exclusively by multilingual speakers	Can be found among monolinguals
Speaker Awareness	Often a conscious rhetorical strategy reflecting an active choice	Speakers can be unaware of the etymology

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It is worthwhile noting that it is possible for code-switching to be the precursor to lexical borrowing. There are instances where borrowing occurs spontaneously and less frequently; in such cases, borrowing appears like code-switching. Sociolinguistics treats these cases as *“borrowing in the making”*, meaning that they are not yet established as loanwords that are frequently and unconsciously adopted even by monolinguals. Rather, they represent the early stage of one of the possible processes leading to borrowing. These cases of borrowing are referred to as **nonce borrowing**, and they can develop to fully-fledged loanwords if used by enough speakers.

6. Conclusion

Lexical borrowing is not indicative of weakness in a language. Rather, it is a sign of a vibrant, adaptive and living system that meets the communicative needs of speakers. Because borrowing has the capacity to **address necessity**, **achieve perceived prestige** and **ensure communicative efficiency**, it is an inevitable phenomenon. Likewise, code-switching is not a sign of cultural detachment. Rather it is a psycholinguistic strategy through which speakers achieve transactional and interactional goals. Borrowing and code-switching mirror histories of languages and substantiate intercultural contact. While sociolinguistics assume an ethically neutral stance towards code-switching and borrowing, it acknowledges that speakers assign different connotations to different codes and items. The goal of the sociolinguist is not to defy these perceptions but rather to account for them, assuming that in the same way that *“beauty is in the eye of the beholder”*, *“linguistic evaluation is in the individual and collective minds of speakers”*.

7. Discussion Question

- A. As a multilingual speaker proficient of English, French and Arabic, reflect on your classmates' and your language use analyse code-switching performance. What type is the dominant? What motivations do you think underpin code-switching?
- B. Reflect on the social world around you; can the use of loanwords and different code be explained with reference to some social variables such as gender, age, education, etc.
- C. Discuss French-driven code-switching and lexical borrowing with members of your community; what attitudes do they have towards

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- them? Are expressed attitudes reflective of actual meanings assigned to French in the Algerian society?
- D. Think of a word from another language that is now being used as “nonce borrowing”; do you think it will develop to a fully-fledged loanword? Explain.
- E. Think of examples of loanwords that are used in the Holy Coran? What does this say about the phenomenon?

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Language Planning: Shaping Language Use in Society

Learning Objective

Upon completing this lesson, learners should be able to:

- Apply the learned concepts to understand cross-cultural communication challenges.
- Discuss the concept of language planning and distinguish it from language policy.
- Compare and contrast the 4 main types of language planning (status, corpus acquisition, prestige) with examples.
- Appreciate the pros and cons of top-down vs. bottom-up language planning.
- Assess agents' contributions to the success of language planning.
- Explain the major problems of language planning such as political, economic, and sociocultural restrictions.

1. Introduction: The Deliberate Shaping of Language

The notion of language planning was first coined by Einar Haugen in the 1950's. This term simply means to purposefully interfering in the status of language within a speech community. This area of study is an integral field within sociolinguistic studies as it determines the linguistic fate of speech communities. Its purpose moves beyond the descriptive task of sketching a particular community's linguistic profile; it rather undergoes some arcane endeavour grounded on political, social, and ethical aspects that have a profound link with identity, education, and power.

At this stage, it is crucial to highlight the difference between language policy and language planning. Let us represent them with a *what* and *how* relationship to comprehensively fathom the distinction. First, think of the language policy as the **goal** and language planning as the **action plan**.

Let us start with the goal, or the *what*. This simply means what a government intends to do or to attain as a new rule or a new objective. For example, when a government declares that all PhD theses must be written in English, or when a country's constitution settles upon a particular ethnic language as an official or national language, these decisions or rules represent language policies. In such cases, governments often integrate the chosen language into public life by inserting it within the educational system and promoting it through the media.

Language planning, on the other hand, refers to the *how* question, i.e. the steps and actions, and how these goals are going to be established. In other terms, it refers to the deliberate efforts to implement these policies by putting in place specific strategies and practical measures. For instance, to insert English as a medium of writing scholarly pieces, governmental organizations may initiate training sessions or create writing centres by assigning trained supervisors. Similarly, to implement the recognition of a particular ethnic language as official, governments integrate it into public life by introducing it into the educational system and the media.

The emergence of language planning as a field of study is directly related to the post-colonial era of the mid-20th century, when the newly independent states across Africa and Asia were forced to forge national unity in front of the diverse linguistic sketch at that time. They had been under the pressure of making some critical decisions: choosing between the colonial language, preserving the local vernaculars, or elevating minority tongues. Such questions sculpted the discipline of language planning, as they are still central to the field.

Upon this dilemma, a fundamental question resonated, fueling a heated debate over the "planability" of language, as crystallized by Rubin and Jernudd (1971) in their seminal work *Can Language Be Planned?* As evidenced by the success of Hebrew's revival against the decline of Irish, despite the state constitutional support, state planning demonstrated limits in reshaping linguistic landscapes. Thus, a successful and comprehensive approach to language planning requires some technical linguistic knowledge in congruity with a critical understanding of power, ideology, and identity.

2. The Quadripartite Framework

Language planning usually includes four types, each emphasizing a distinct aspect of language use within society, as categorized by the linguist Robert L. Cooper, though the early framework established a classic typology of three main types as demonstrated in the theoretical work of the linguist Einar Haugen.

2.1. Status Planning

Status planning refers to the deliberate efforts made by governmental bodies to change the standing and functions of a particular language within society as official, regional, educational, or international, by institutionalizing decisions about language use in the public field such as education, courts, governments, and media. Illustrative examples are the case of declaring Kabyle as an official and national language in Algeria, considering low-status Haitian Creole as an official language in Haiti compared to French, or establishing Swahili as an official and national language in Tanzania to reduce reliance on English.

2.2. Corpus Planning

Corpus planning is the deliberate effort to develop, modify, or preserve a language. It refers to sanctioned prescriptive changes in the structure or form of language, namely vocabulary, script, grammar, and spelling, to make it appropriate for the intended function. Therefore, status planning decides where the language in question will be used, whereas corpus planning works on what form the language will take. Corpus planning involves three pillars:

- **Graphisation:** developing or modifying a writing system/script.
- **Standardisation:** developing and promoting a uniform standard variety that is accepted as the correct form through education and media.
- **Modernisation:** developing new terminology for fields like science, law, and technology.

For instance, the German language went through a process of lexical purism against modernization, replacing foreign loanwords or technology-related terminology with native terms, such as the word telephone, which was replaced with Fernsprecher (literally “far-speaker”). The same purpose was attained for the case of Icelandic where experts coined new terms for modern concepts like computer, television and internet to prevent loanwords.

2.3. Acquisition Planning

Acquisition planning refers to deliberate efforts to increase the number of speakers of a language, primarily through formal educational systems and language promotion campaigns (Cooper, 1989). In other words, acquisition planning pertains to

the users of a language and how this language is learned and taught. This is typically maintained through: educational integration (using the language as a medium of instruction or making it mandatory in school curricula), resource development (creating textbooks, dictionaries, and learning materials) and teacher training (training educators to teach the language).

As an illustration, the Māori language of New Zealand was immersed in schools as an effort to revitalize the language. For the same purpose, China mandated the teaching of Mandarin to ensure its spread and use across the regions.

2.4. Prestige Planning

Prestige planning involves deliberate efforts to change a language's public image and how it is perceived within society. This type of planning focuses on shaping attitudes, ideologies, and values toward a language.

This is often achieved through public media campaigns, elevating a language's use in education, and granting it symbolic recognition. These actions can promote pride and foster positive attitudes about speaking a particular language.

For example, Irish revival campaigns use music, television, and literature to promote Irish as a symbol of cultural pride. In Wales, the language is featured on all road signs and public documents alongside English, reinforcing its status. Similarly, the use of Hebrew in Israeli universities gave it modern prestige beyond religious contexts, which was vital for its revival.

There are two main components of prestige planning: overt prestige and covert prestige. **Overt prestige** refers to officially recognized and valued forms of prestige that are related to the standard and overtly most prestigious variety. Speakers usually opt for these overtly prestigious varieties as they are linked with education and authority. **Covert prestige** refers to forms that are not officially established as prestigious, but they are covertly valued within specific social groups. Speakers usually adopt these forms as they demonstrate identity, solidarity, or resistance to authority. In sum, prestige planning operates at the field level of culture, identity and perception.

3. Agents and Actors in Language Planning

The question that should be raised at this level is: who does the planning? Language planning is not the job of a single expert or political authority; rather, it is a

multi-levelled task carried out by many agents, each exercising different degrees of influence and control:

- **Government Agencies:** are the most authoritative actors as they can enact and uphold new language policies, for instance: ministries of education, official language boards like High Council for the Arabic Language (Haut Conseil de la langue arabe) and Algerian Academy of the Amazigh Language (Académie algérienne de la langue amazighe) in Algeria.
- **Non-governmental organizations:** as the term itself denotes, these actors have no formal legislative authority; however, they are the linchpin of the national and social language organizations as they play a critical role in preserving minority and neglected linguistic varieties such as the World Amazigh Congress in Algeria (which a civil society organization) and the Welsh Language Society. These bodies task is to promote recognition of minority and moribund languages.
- **Institutions:** such as schools, universities, religious bodies that can aid governments implement new strategies, services or practices locally within their domains through designing new curricula, imposing new teaching practices and even giving religious instructions or suggest services to help shape how language is use, valued and transmitted socially.
- **Individuals:** here, we are not technically referring to language speakers of a society in general, but rather luminaries in their field such as eminent politicians, prominent writers, grammarians, lexicographers, etc. These influential individuals can have a decisive role and a permanent mark on how a speech community speaks or writes.

4. Top-Down vs. Bottom-Up Planning

Language planning is fundamentally bidirectional as it operates in two directions; that is to say, language planning is not a unilateral process where governmental bodies in control enact and impose laws and policies on a passive or a dormant society. Instead, it depends on top-down forces (government authorities) and bottom-up forces (the speech community, prominent figures, media, etc). This bidirectionality is vital in apprehending why some policies fail and others bear fruit.

4.1. Top-Down Planning (The Official Direction)

This form of planning reflects the role of higher authorities and governmental legislative impact. It is the most conspicuous form of language planning, usually carried out on a national scale. Its goal is often to fulfil national unity and serve broader political and social purposes.

4.2. Bottom-Up Planning (The Community Direction)

This form of planning emerges from the speech community itself. It is achieved through grassroots initiatives that influence speakers' attitudes, promote cultural pride, and ensure intergenerational transmission. Bottom-up planning often arises in contexts of language revitalization, identity preservation, or resistance to dominance.

5. Conclusion

Language planning is a key field of work within sociolinguistics that associates language with politics and society. It proves to be useful in multilingual speech communities where decisions about assigning which variety will serve as national or official in face of globalization and modernisation pressures. Nevertheless, language planning is not always promising as expected due to some challenges and criticisms. Scholars claim that languages take their course within society naturally as they are not machine like entities; for instance, the revitalization of Irish achieved no positive outcomes whatsoever despite the heavy investment governments put into action. Another key problem that the process of language planning faces is the one direction operation as the voices and views of grassroots are neglected favouring state and elite voices which eventually leads to resistance and raises questions about linguistic human rights.

It should be noted that assigning a language as national or official is complicated without the necessary materials and resources—such as trained teachers, media presence, textbooks, and financial investment—since, without sufficient resources, enacted decisions remain symbolic rather than practical.

6. Discussion Questions

- A. Consider your own country. What are some clear examples of status, corpus, acquisition, and prestige planning that have taken place? Who were the primary agents involved in each case?

- B. Imagine a newly independent nation with several major regional languages. Is it preferred to choose one national language, two, or all of them? What are the potential challenges of each protocol they follow? Justify your choice using concepts from the lesson.
- C. Is it ethical for a government to restrict the use of foreign languages in media or advertising (as France does with French) to protect its national language? Where should the line be drawn between language protection and linguistic freedom?
- D. To what extent is language planning a neutral, technical activity versus a tool of political control? Consider cases where language planning has been used to unify nations versus cases where it has suppressed minorities.
- E. In the age of global English, should governments prioritize international competitiveness by promoting English, or focus on protecting and revitalizing local languages? Can both be achieved?
- F. Some countries (like Iceland) avoid foreign loanwords by creating native neologisms. Is this an act of cultural preservation, or does it isolate the language from global communication?
- G. Why did Hebrew revival succeed, while Irish revival largely failed despite strong state support? What does this comparison reveal about the limits of language planning?
- H. With AI, social media, and machine translation now shaping language use, is traditional language planning becoming less relevant? How might planners adapt to technological pressures?

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Sociolinguistics and Education: Language and Social Factors in the Classroom

Learning Objectives

Upon completing this lesson, learners should be able to:

- Identify the relevance of sociolinguistics to educational contexts.
- Explain the concepts of language variation, dialects and register.
- Analyse the implications of attitudes and prejudice in shaping pedagogical practices.
- Understanding code-switching as a pedagogical tool.
- Critically evaluate how standardised language ideologies impacted formal school practices.
- Explain the difference between a deficit perspective and an asset-based perspective.
- Consider how sociolinguistic perspectives help create linguistically inclusive and equitable classrooms.

1. Introduction

Sociolinguistics is the systematic study that seeks to account for language and society. It traditionally is concerned with describing how social factors— such as gender, age, status, ethnicity and origin— interplay with the way people use language. Sociolinguistics lenses offer a dynamic perspective where language is perceived not only as a set of abstract rules but also as a living practice that is deeply rooted in sociocultural identity.

Because language is perceived as a medium to foster solidarity, express identity and navigate the social life, it is important for educators to understand sociolinguistic principles, not only by way of academic exercise but also as a fundamental prerequisite that fosters effective and equitable pedagogy. By understanding linguistic diversity in society and, by extension, in classroom, educators manage to navigate language differences and critically address linguistic prejudice. This consequently leads to the

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fostering of inclusive learning that values diversity and embraces differences. Sociolinguist educators recognise that language is not a monolithic system; rather, it is a dynamic practice that is mediated by social variables from which it cannot be divorced.

In the more particular language teaching context, the relevance of sociolinguistics is even more eminent. Language teachers need to be aware the language teaching inherently involves teaching a social and cultural expression. Recent models of language acquisition identified that knowledge of language involves not only linguistic competence where learners master the structure of language, but also communicative competence where learners have an understanding of the sociocultural norms of communication.

2. Why Sociolinguistics in Education

The sociolinguistic lens treats classrooms not only as a place for formal schooling but also as communicative and social environment where different dialects and sociolects converge with different formal and informal registers. The classroom is, thus, a segment of the social world; institutional power is exercised through language policies, including curricular design and assessment criteria. Sociolinguistics offers a distinct perspective where language practices both shape and are shaped by educational practices. It recognises how the social identities of students and teachers are constantly being negotiated using language and how attitudes towards languages can impact their performance, self-perception and well-being.

Sociolinguistic adopts a descriptivist stance but also strives for critical realism. The descriptive approach allows researchers to account for social realities in academic settings and objectively capture language practices, attitudes and policies. On the other hand, the critical realist approach challenges existing malpractices that are either ineffective, non-inclusive, unjust or psychologically harmful. Through the descriptivist accounts of language dynamics, critical realist implications enable the educators and policy makers to avoid inadvertent perpetuation of linguistic inequality and foster linguistic justice where students from different backgrounds all have equal opportunities to succeed.

3. Language Variation in Classroom

Sociolinguistics captures language variation at three main levels: regional, social and functional. The three levels of variation result in three distinct varieties:

- **Regional Variation:** languages can vary depending on the geographical area. Different vocabulary, accents and even grammatical rules can be found across different geographical areas. These are often referred to as **dialects**.
- **Social Variation:** even within the same geographical setting, language can take different forms at all levels depending on gender, age, class, or status. Differences that are attributable to social factors result in what is commonly referred to as **sociolects**.
- **Functional Variation:** language can take different forms depending on the communicative function. The language used to address a friend is stylistically different from that used to file a formal complaint. Differences that are based on communicative purpose are referred to as **registers**.

Traditional linguistics and prescriptivist paradigms perpetuated the dominant belief of **Standard Language Ideology**. It is conceived that the inherently correct, superior form of language is the standard language, which is rule governed and significantly more expressive. Local varieties and colloquial forms are believed to be inferior, random, incorrect and unstructured. However, the descriptivist sociolinguistic paradigm argues that no language is inherently more logical or elegant. It is socio-historical factors that elevate a variety to prestige status in accordance with its speakers' social, political and economic status.

In educational settings, this ideology manifest as the belief that only Standard Academic English is acceptable in classroom, often favouring British Received Pronunciation or Queen's English. Sociolinguistics posits that while Standard Academic English is important to provide the learners with access to power structures, the problem arises when native-like pronunciation is idealised and local varieties are undermined despite being intelligible and norm-conforming.

4. Language Attitudes

One of the central issues in sociolinguistic inquiry is language attitudes and linguistic discrimination. It is noticed that individuals rarely hold neutral attitudes towards languages. Instead, they make conscious or unconscious evaluations about a speaker's intelligence, competence and status based on the language they speak and the way they talk. In extreme cases, these evaluations, called **language attitudes**, can lead to **linguistic discrimination**, which is often referred to as **linguicism**.

One of the most frequently quote case of linguisticism is the perception that a student using African American Vernacular English (AAVE) can be perceived as lacking intelligence and rigour as they assume that AAVE is not a structured or grammar-bound form of language (Rhoden, 2017; O'Quin, 2021). Ultimately, these perception may lead teachers and learners to have lower expectations about their possible performance, which may lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy of underachievement.

Sociolinguistics challenges these core assumptions and provides the intellectual and practical tools to dismantle linguisticism:

- **Debunking the Deficit Model through Scientific Evidence:** the perception that vernacular varieties are ungrammatical falls under the Deficit Model, where the students' local varieties are framed as deficit versions of the standard language. Sociolinguists, such as William Labov, showed that vernacular varieties are not defective; rather, they are rule governed systems. The use of habitual "be" in the sentence "he be working" was shown as being different from "he is working" in the sense that the second assumes continuous action whereas the first assumes habitual action. Moreover, linguists showed the copular deletion in "he coming" is not haphazard and is motivated by syntactic constraints. In the local context, a number of studies showed that local dialects are also rule governed. For example, the study of Dr. Mhamedi on the phonology of local dialects in Djelfa and Laghouat demonstrates the pattern of lexical stress placement in a way that is equally structured to that of Standard Arabic. Through these case studies, sociolinguistics corroborates the idea that non-standard varieties are legitimate, complex and structure linguistic systems and invalidates the deficit perspective. Sociolinguistics champions an alternative perspective, the **Asset-Based Model**, where students' language is viewed as a valuable resource, an inextricable foundation for learning and an integral part of identity. This model celebrates culturality and teaches standard languages without compromising linguistic heritage.
- **Exposing Ideologies and Power Structures:** The role of sociolinguists also lies in their critical quest to expose language ideologies and power structures by investigating the underlying reason for the privileged status for some varieties over others. It describes the deeply rooted and ingrained, often unconscious, beliefs that individuals hold where style

is linked to status. Sociolinguistics conceptualises prestige not as an inherent feature of language but as a socially and politically constructed superiority. It shows how power is exercised through institutional practices, such as education, media and jurisdiction. The part of functional studies that is primarily concerned with these practices is referred to as **Critical Discourse Analysis**.

- **Embracing the Difference Model:** the Difference Model posits that different social groups use different linguistic varieties that are equally valid and suitable for their cultural contexts. Sociolinguists argue that being a communicatively competent speaker involves not only knowledge of standard language norms but also the contextual and sociocultural specifications of communication. William Labov illustrated how individuals shift their style depending on the conversational event. Therefore, educators should acknowledge that formal examinations, presentations and group discussions are different communicative event that require shifts in style.

The framework provided by sociolinguistics is, therefore, beneficial in many aspects by virtue of being **scientifically proving** that stigmatised varieties are equally structured, **politically exposing** practices of linguisticism, **conceptually cultivating** a perspective of difference rather than deficit and finally **pedagogically advocating** teaching philosophies that teach target forms while celebrating cultural identities.

5. Conclusion

Sociolinguistics offers an essential perspective that helps understand the complex interplay of language, culture and power. Its theoretical grounding can be projected on educational environment to provide a more meaningful interpretation of teaching practices. By moving from a deficit perspective towards an asset-based one, differences are celebrated and linguistic diversity is cherished, offering an opportunity for educational equity and linguistic justice. By understanding power dynamics and their reflection on linguistic practices, educators can draw a more informed pedagogical policy where students are empowered with metalinguistic awareness, thinking critically about their language and the standard language. Being aware of the context-sensitive use of language, both learners and educators develop the skills to successfully perform communicative acts in different contexts. The ultimate goal of educational sociolinguistics is to challenge malpractices and create inclusive and engaging classrooms.

6. Discussion Questions

- A. The deficit model of language is still common in the Algerian society and schools. Reflect on your social and educational experience and provide examples of cases where you observed this model in action. What do you think are the long-term consequences for learners?
- B. Do you think the educational system in Algeria is informed by sociolinguistic principles? Illustrate how knowledge of sociolinguistics can improve the linguistic practices in schools and make the language policy more effective.
- C. Do you think that the course of sociolinguistics helped you become a more self-conscious educators? How do you think sociolinguistics can help you become a better teacher? What active decisions will you take in your classroom that are informed by sociolinguistic principles?

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How to Do Sociolinguistics: The Sociolinguist's Toolkit

Learning Objectives

Upon completing this lesson, learners should be able to:

- Describe the core mindset, character features and intellectual curiosity that drives research in sociolinguistics.
- Identify the major methodological designs used in sociolinguistic inquiry, including large-scale surveys and ethnographic observational research.
- Understand the ethical responsibilities that accompany research on how people speak.
- Outline the fundamental steps in designing a sociolinguistic research project.
- Acknowledge the major personal traits that distinguish successful sociolinguists.
- Reflect on prospective real-world applications of sociolinguistics in the learners' speech community.

1. Introduction: Sociolinguists as Scholars and Social Detectives

The primary goal of sociolinguists is to understand social structures, holding the contention that social values and conventions are embedded in linguistic forms and functions. Sociolinguists are immersed in the daily social life; they are social detectives who try to work out the interplay between social and linguistic structures. A sociolinguistic project does not typically start in research laboratories. Rather, it initiates through a fundamental curiosity about the world around you.

Sociolinguistics is about paying structured attention to the “patterns” of human interactions and wanting to understand the “rhythms” and “rules” that underpin these interactions. This entails a rudimentary recognition of the fact that social interactions through language are equally structured as the structures of language itself and that no materialisations of language in society are haphazard.

A sociolinguist is, thus, someone who hears a unique turn of phrase, a distinct accent, a shift in the conversational style, an uncharacteristic choice of diction, and then asks “**WHY?**”.

Why do people from different geographical backgrounds speak differently? Why do we change the way we speak in the presence of different addressees (e.g., a boss vs. a close friend)? Why are certain linguistic features and ‘ways of talking’ stigmatised while others have a prestigious status? These questions reflect a relentless curiosity about language and society, which is essentially the engine of sociolinguistic inquiry.

Sociolinguists share the task of traditional formal linguists as they inquire about the grammatical rules of a dialect, its phonological and morphological structures and the possible variations in pragmatic functions. However, they transcend this scope by asking subsequent questions: why do these rules exist? How do they manifest in social interactions? How do they reflect social values? And what are the social consequences of people speaking in a certain way?

It transpires, then, that doing sociolinguistics means embracing **social contexts** as the primary source of data and recognising language as a **social act**.

2. Sociolinguistic Projects as a Descriptive, Not Prescriptive, Endeavour

The main feature that distinguishes sociolinguistic inquiry from traditional formal analyses of language is descriptivism. Sociolinguists are not concerned with **prescriptive** accounts of language that dictate how language should be used. They hold an ethically neutral view towards the analysed variety, assuming that the best way to understand language is to see **how it is used** (i.e., descriptivism) rather than **how it should be used** (i.e., prescriptivism). By so doing, sociolinguistic inquiry is not concerned with grammatical correctness, nor does it approach data from a ‘**correct/incorrect**’ perspective.

Sociolinguists, therefore, avoid terms such as ‘broken’ English, ‘lazy’ grammar and ‘sloppy’ pronunciation. In fact, they contend that local, often colloquial, varieties are equally structured and rule-governed as standard varieties and that variations serve linguistic and/or social functions. More importantly, researchers in this field perceive all varieties at equal footing and argue that no language/dialect/accents is inherently better, and the linguistic status of one variety is a reflection of the social

status of its speakers. Languages assume higher and more prestigious statuses, not because they are inherently more structured/superior, but due to the social functions they serve (e.g., literary and liturgical varieties).

Therefore, the task of sociolinguists is to unearth linguistic rules and understand their functions without imposing linguistic biases. This task, however simply phrased, requires genuine humility and respect for the speech community and variety under examination.

3. The Sociolinguistic Ear

The idea that sociolinguists need to be equipped with a sociolinguistic ear means that researchers must have the capacity to perceive and account for different linguistic variations not only as phonological differences but also as socially meaningful practices. In the same way that a musician is capable of distinguishing tonal nuances, a sociolinguist is attuned to the fine-grained features of speech. They pay careful attention to accent differences, materialising in intonation and rhythm. They also are highly mindful of lexical, morphological and syntactic variation, and they seek to interpret these findings in light of social meanings assigned to them by the speakers.

For example, the inclusion of Standard Arabic words in colloquial speech is not simply reducible to a matter of casual articulation and use of language. It is perceived as an indexation of formality, situational communicative needs and even generational identity. It is only through these interpretations that sociolinguists are capable of going beyond immediate structural descriptions towards a more informed understanding of how speakers position themselves in their society, creating a network and a community of practice with power, solidarity and identity implications.

The cultivation of a sociolinguistic ear requires an understanding that linguistic forms attain significance through social evaluations. For example, the realisation of the letter “r” in French as a voiced uvular fricative /ʁ/ or voiceless /x/ is dictated by purely linguistic constraints, depending on the position of the sound in the word. However, its realisation as a voiced alveolar trill /r/ is dictated by social factors such as the speakers’ age, region, nativeness and gender, etc. In similar fashion, the alternation between “tu” and “vous” in French can be explained by situational appropriateness rather than structural constraints. Moreover, the code-switching between Berber, Arabic, French and English among Algerian speakers can be explained through social

lenses of identity, politeness strategies, ideology and symbolic capital as adopting a formal linguistic lens can be inadequate for a complete understanding.

The researcher's ability to "hear" these variations requires not only auditory discrimination but also sensitiveness to sociocultural nuances and awareness of possible social interpretations. It involves the capacity to link language use to a broader spectrum of constructs (class stratifications, gender, age, and region, etc.). The importance of the sociolinguistic ear lies in its usages as an analytic tool and a methodological stance that allows the researcher to perceive language as an index of social meanings rather than being an autonomous system.

4. The Methodological Toolkit

Being an essential social study, sociolinguistics adopts a wide range of methods that are found in sociology and ethnographic studies. An array of qualitative and quantitative methods can be used to answer research questions. Therefore, a sociolinguist needs to be attuned to the peculiarities of research methodology such that sociolinguistic phenomena are approached in a systematic and structured manner.

4.1. The Sociolinguistic Interview

One of the most common methods of data collection in sociolinguistics is the sociolinguistic interview. It is pioneered by William Labov in the 1960s' and is designed to capture speech variations from the one single speaker at a time. While the data that is obtained from the sociolinguistic interview is inherently qualitative by virtue of being in the form of words, sounds, intonations patterns, it can be used in quantitative accounts where the frequency of occurrence of one linguistic feature is calculated and compared cross-sectionally among the sample.

Unlike interviews in social studies, the main goal of these sociolinguistic interviews is not to capture perceptions and attitudes. Rather, it aims at eliciting natural speech. The researcher is not primarily concerned with the content of the interviewee's output. Instead, they focus on how they phrase it given the situational configurations of that interaction. The overwhelming task of the researcher is to ensure that the speech generated is casual, spontaneous and unmonitored as the main goal is to capture how language is genuinely used by the speakers.

The researcher proceeds to take notes of inter-speaker and intra-speaker variations. That is, they account for how choice of diction, intonation, accent, etc., is

different from one speaker to another, and how even the same speaker can adopt different styles in different contexts.

Because speakers often are sensitive to the researcher's presence, Labov devised a set of strategies that desensitise informants to the researcher's presence, ensuring that their speech is natural and optimally unmonitored. In view of that, the interview generally transitions from formal speech (reading a word list) to informal casual speech. To do that, the researcher ensures that the informant is emotionally engaged with them; they ask them questions that are emotionally loaded. William Labov used the "danger of death" component where the interviewee is asked "have you ever been in a situation where you thought you would die?". This question distracts the speaker from monitoring their speech by engaging them emotionally with the interviewer. The researcher can achieve this goal also using narrative and story-telling tasks by asking questions such as "what was the most memorable day of your childhood?".

The researcher takes notes of the data, often through recording, and counts how often the target variations occur. For example, in his study of New York accent, Labov counted the frequency at which different speakers drop the post-vocalic /r/ by asking them questions that elicit the response "fourth floor". In a local context, you can approach your participants and ask them questions that elicit the word "tomorrow" and see the frequency at which the variants /ʏ/ and /q/ are used among different speakers.

One of the benefits of the sociolinguistic interview is the ease with which sample linguistic output is collected and the breadth of the data. It allows the collection of data at different linguistic levels:

- **Phonological Variation:** whether Algerian speakers use /q/ or /g/ in the word "he said"
- **Morphological Variation:** whether they use /u/ or /ah/ to indicate third masculine third person singular pronouns in the word "I ask him"
- **Lexical Variation:** whether speakers use /luuṭu/, /ṭunubiil/ or /karruuṣa/ to refer to "car"
- **Syntactic Variation:** how negation is realised differently in the Algerian dialect

- **Discourse-Pragmatic Features:** how different speakers use discursive fillers /ayya/, /yak/, /lmuhim/

Notwithstanding the noticeable advantages of the sociolinguistic interview, novice researchers need to pay attention to the inherent limitations that can come along. The following are a set of practical challenges that can limit the actionability of sociolinguistic interview:

- **Observer's Paradox:** researchers aim to elicit natural every-day and spontaneous speech, but the moment a person is interviewed, the context is no longer natural as being interviewed is not part of every-day communicative interactions.
- **Interview's Effect:** the gender of the interviewer, their class, ethnicity and age can be a contributing factor that leads participants to adjust their speech accordingly.
- **Cultural Appropriateness:** in some societies, asking participants personal questions is not appropriate and can be perceived as intrusive.
- **Data Preservation:** it is sometimes challenging to obtain informed consent to record data.

4.2. Ethnographic Studies

Because language is a highly social phenomenon, some scholars believe that the interview can be inadequate to understand the depth of sociolinguistic structures. Therefore, they suggest an alternative method where researchers are extensively immersed in the speech community in an extended period. Proponents of this approach argue that the quantitative account of variation frequencies is insufficient, and researchers need to highlight context, culture and meaning-making. As opposed to Labovian variationist sociolinguistics, ethnographic studies emphasise long-term qualitative accounts where the researcher takes part as a member of the community being examined.

The purpose of ethnographic sociolinguistic studies can be summarised as follows:

- To understand how linguistic behaviours are embedded in the social lives of speakers
- To account for the meanings that speakers attach to linguistic forms
- To uncover how identity, power and community membership are established and negotiated through language use
- To capture authentic data in culturally specific contexts

It transpires, then, that ethnographic studies of linguistic behaviours are not about counting features. Rather, it is about understanding the symbolic values that speakers assign to these features. Because it is longitudinal in nature, ethnographic studies are not fixed to one method as they incorporate different techniques:

- **Participatory observation:** where researchers spend a long time with the community, build rapport and gain membership, which allows them to have access to authentic data.
- **Field Notes:** where researcher keep logs of interaction, contextual and non-verbal cues and meanings assigned to them.
- **Audio/Video Recording:** where researcher preserve data to reflect upon it at later times.

Through these techniques, researcher are expected to track data that is pertinent to the following linguistic behaviours:

- **Narratives in Natural Settings:** weddings, family gatherings and other social events
- **Code-Switching and Multilingual Practices:** how different varieties have different functions
- **Discourse Patterns:** how situational settings shape linguistic choices
- **Ideology:** what values speakers assign to their speech and what attitudes they hold towards other non-conforming practices
- **Interactional Routine:** how meaning is constructed and negotiated in greetings, story-telling styles; how politeness is achieved

While being a highly prolific, adopting an ethnographic design comes with some practical limitations that novice sociolinguists need to be cognizant of.

- **Time-Consuming Process:** some sociolinguistic projects adopting an ethnographic design last more than a decade.
- **Subjectivity:** inherent with qualitative studies, the researcher's own biases may well interfere with the interpretation of the findings.
- **Desensitisation:** an important phase in ethnographic studies is "becoming native". While this is crucial to ensure naturalness of data, it can lead to under-identification of linguistic behaviours. Labov (1972) argues, in his **principle of preferential ignorance**, that extensive familiarity with a speech community is likely to cause under-differentiation of subtle linguistic behaviours.
- **Replicability:** one of the major criticisms levelled against ethnographic studies is that they are almost impossible to replicate, which means that the conclusions are hardly generalisable.
- **Ethical Considerations:** researchers need to be aware that they need to hold an ethically neutral ground towards the practices in the observed community. Informed consent and anonymity are crucial in ethnographic studies.

4.3. Matched-Guise Technique

Sociolinguists aim at understanding attitudes towards languages. In their desire to elicit authentic and true attitudes that are not influenced by social desirability biases (the informant's desire to appeal to the general social perception rather than giving their honest opinions) or any defence mechanisms (unconscious strategies that individuals use to protect themselves from anxiety and stress), Wallace Lambert and his colleagues developed a technique that elicit unmonitored attitudinal data in a way that is perceived effective and unobtrusive.

The matched-guise technique is influenced by the research practices in social psychology where individual's attitudes towards languages, accents, dialects are investigated. The main idea of this technique is that the participants are asked to judge the same speaker against a set of criteria. The speaker is audio-recorded using different accents, dialects or languages, and the participants are not aware that it is the same

speaker. By so doing, external factors such as the speaker's age, gender or tone are eliminated, and the only factor determining attitudes is the linguistic variety being used.

Due to the variable control in this technique, it is perceived as a highly accurate tool for unearthing covert language attitudes that individuals may not necessarily admit in surveys. Moreover, because the speaker is the same, the differences in the evaluations by the participants can be interpreted as evaluations of the language rather than evaluations of the speaker. This helps understand how varieties are stereotyped in terms of their speakers' intelligence, solidarity, prestige and overall status. This technique is, therefore, fundamental in understanding power dynamic in a speech community without risking obtaining unauthentic data that can otherwise be elicited through surveys and interviews.

As the matched-guise technique targets subconsciously held attitudes, its success requires careful attention to details. First, the speaker chosen for the task needs to pass off as a native speaker of both varieties, which can be challenging to achieve. Second, the participants should not be informed about the purpose of the experiment in order to reduce monitoring. This also means that the design of the experiment should be such that it does not directly communicate the purpose. Finally, recent studies recommend complementing this technique with other data collection methods, such as interviews that can offer more explanatory prospects to the findings.

In addition to the methods highlighted above, sociolinguists can also use more advanced methods such as corpus analysis where larger datasets are analysed to explore a wide range of textual properties (stylistic features and register variations) and other linguistic phenomena (code-switching, language change, regional variation, etc.)

5. Conclusion

Stating a sociolinguistics project means embarking on a continuous journey of discovery. The journey starts with structured listening to language with the contention that all aspects of language use can be described in terms of patterns. This requires an analytical mind, and empathetic ear and an ethical conscience. This journey is cyclical rather than linear and can be summarised as follows:

- **Observation and Questioning:** the sociolinguist observes language use and constantly asks the questions "how?" and "why?". The first

question seeks to offer descriptions whereas the second aims at providing socially-informed interpretations and explanations.

- **Method Selection:** depending on the nature of the project, the researcher's resources and overarching purpose, the research chooses the most suitable methodological toolkit to answer their questions.
- **Data Collection:** the researcher proceeds to faithfully, ethically and responsibly collect and preserve relevant data, ensuring the investigated community's dignity and well-being.
- **Systematic Analysis:** whether qualitative or quantitative, data should be approached systematically, identifying compelling patterns.
- **Interpretation and Contextualisation:** the researcher tries to assign meaning to their findings in terms of the general picture of social structures and linguistic behaviours.
- **Sharing:** in critical theory-oriented research, the primary goal of the researcher is to make the world a better place. The researcher needs to share their findings with the academic world and, if applicable, highlight how the findings can make a positive impact.

6. Discussion Questions

- A. Reflect on practices in your own social network (family, friends and university). What examples of linguistic variation can you identify? Formulate researchable sociolinguistic questions based on these observations
- B. What Methodological approach would be the most suitable to address your questions. What challenges do you expect?
- C. Imagine that you are studying the variety used by a minority group. What ethical consideration should you be aware of? How would you obtain consent?
- D. If one of your projects revealed that teachers in a local school held negative attitudes towards the dialect that the students speak, how would you transform your research into a positively impactful project?

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