Sociolinguistics - Origins and Growth

Chapter II

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If ‘eternal vigilance’ was once the slogan of a puristic and prescriptively minded linguistic age, the linguistic slogan of the new century should be ‘eternal tolerance’.

David Crystal

Chapter I has briefly introduced the major topics to be elaborated in the subsequent chapters. The introductory chapter presents language study as a topic of great importance and sociolinguistics as an essential part of it. Chapter I also introduces Madhavikkkutty as a versatile writer known worldwide and examines how sociolinguistics becomes relevant in the study of her works. Since sociolinguistic study is the theoretical basis of this research paper, it is essential to have a look at its origins, development and present position before going in to a detailed study of the author concerned.

Language is an unavoidable reality of the world and plays a significant role in human life. But the fact remains that many people still consider the study of language as superfluous and an area that does not deserve much attention. As Leonard Bloomfield says, “Perhaps because of its familiarity, we rarely observe it, taking it rather for granted, as we do breathing or walking. The effects of language are remarkable, and include much of what distinguishes man from the animals”(3).
Language is very intimately tied up with society; it gets reduced to a set of mere linguistic items such as sounds, words and grammatical structures when excluded from the social contexts in which it is used. The growing awareness of the interrelationship between language and society has led to the growth of the discipline known as 'sociolinguistics'. A study of language and its speakers undertaken simultaneously may be said to constitute the field of study of Sociolinguistics. An individual may not consistently use one homogeneous language variety for verbal communication on all occasions. He may be using more than one variety. The varieties of language he uses are determined by socio-cultural factors. Sociolinguistics thus studies the verbal behaviour of the individual who is a member of a speech community.

According to Florian Coulmas:

Sociolinguistics is the empirical study of how language is used in a society. Combining linguistic and sociological theories and methods, it is an interdisciplinary field of research, which attaches great significance both to the variability of language and to the multiplicity of languages, and language forms in a given society. (Sociolinguistics 563)

Generally people assess others not only from the factual content of what they say or write but also from the way they use language. What causes
people to resort to the way they use language and what distinguishes one person's style from another's are some very complex problems dealt with in sociolinguistics. The close interrelationship between language and culture or linguistic structure and social structure can very well be illustrated with the example of a boy whose linguistic utterances vary with the listener and the social context although he may be expressing the same idea. The boy tells his peers, 'Come along with me'. But he does not use the same linguistic structure if the addressee is his father. He uses the more polite form, 'Father, please come along with me'. The boy resorts to the much more formal and polite usage, 'Sir could you please come along with me', when the addressee is someone socially superior to him and a social distance exists between them.

How individuals differ from one another in the way they speak and what contributes to such differences form a very interesting topic of study. Some of the differences in speech may be personal, but beyond that there are differences associated with class or group, gender, context and many such factors. Men differ from women in their pitch and also in the way they use language. Similarly an adult never speaks like a child. These two are biologically determined differences of language use. Other than these two there are dimensions of social variation in language determined by other factors. Differences in social prestige, education, wealth and power do exercise great influence on the mode of speech. In the words of Gregory R. Guy:
Bankers clearly do not talk the same as bus boys, and professors don’t sound like plumbers. They signal the social differences between them by features of their phonology, grammar and lexical choice, just as they do extra-linguistically by their choices in clothing, cars, and so on. (37)

As commented by Peter Trudgill:

[---], language is very much a social phenomenon. A study of language totally without reference to its social context inevitably leads to the omission of some of the more complex and interesting aspects of language and to the loss of opportunities for further theoretical progress. One of the main factors that have led to the growth of sociolinguistic research has been the recognition of the importance of the fact that language is a very variable phenomenon, and that this variability may have as much to do with society as with language. (... Language and Society 20)

The scope of sociolinguistics has widened further. Some of the areas covered under sociolinguistics are: speech variation and social stratification, social roles of different languages co-existing in a speech community, language planning, development and spread of lingua franca, language acculturation, language and socialisation, occupations and language
distribution, language judgment and evaluation, bilingualism/multilingualism, standardisation of language, and dialect studies.

Dialect Studies

It is in the twentieth century that sociolinguistics rose to the status of an independent discipline; but it is seen that systematic investigation of human speech began with the nineteenth century itself. Even from the end of the eighteenth century, taking inspiration from Jean Jacques Rousseau, many scholars and literary figures began to evince much interest in the study of native dialect and soon they were joined by the linguists who were eager to show that dialects as well as literary languages had respectable pedigrees. A literary event that gave a fillip to this movement was the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* in the year 1798. It contained poems very much different from those that had appeared in English language till then. In the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth, the author criticized the artificial diction of the poems written in the eighteenth century and recommended that poetry should be written in the real language of men. In fact he provided the impetus to make the language of poetry, especially dialogue to take account of contemporary speech and to make the speech of its characters less artificial. The principal characters dealt with in poetry till then had been members of the sophisticated classes and the urbanites. But Wordsworth’s interest deviated from such people and concentrated on the rustics who lived in close
communion with nature. For him, real people included ordinary people from the country, children and members of classes other than the sophisticated urbanites. In this way Wordsworth signalled the break with the Augustan period and the onset of Romanticism which focused attention on the spirit of the folk in language, particularly as represented in dialect.

Madhavikkutty is one such writer who believes that the ordinary people, the underprivileged ones, and those looked upon by the society as low class have their lot to play in society. She has no hesitation in saying that in any big city, it is such people, their ways of living, their dialect and the like which caught her attention more than the sophisticated people. In her younger days her father used to say: "You are always with the servants. Now you talk just like them. Cheap low class talk"¹(NPK196).

Madhavikkutty devotes pages for the sake of exposing the every interesting discussions that took place in the back yard and kitchen of her ancestral home of Nalappat. The servants made a deep impression upon the mind of the author who was a young girl at that time. She believed that in their absence life lost its lustre. Any trivial topic would be discussed at length and very often the discussion digressed, taking on personal undertones and sometimes ending in acrimony and discord. It is very interesting to observe one such instance where Kamala is a passive listener and others present on the scene take active participation in the discussion.
In the novel *NPK*, ammamma tells herself that Kamala is quite weak and thin and she should be fed on the proper diet so that she gains weight before she leaves for Calcutta. All the members present there put forward their own suggestions as the young girl Kamala sits immersed in the verbal fight that follows.

“Let her eat some sesame on empty stomach and drink water. This will yield results in just one week.” Kali Narayanan Nair said. 2

“This child won’t eat such things. Let her eat two black gram vadas* every night before retiring to bed and drink some milk. That’s enough. She will grow fair and fat and you will not even recognize her”, Madhaviamma said.

“You look as though you have eaten a lot of black gram vadas…”, Kali Narayanan Nair said.

“Do you mean that my body is fat? You have not seen fat people then. Have you seen kapraserry Kammal?” Madhaviamma asked.

“Your curse will destroy me, oh my Kannengal Goddess…” Madhaviamma said excitedly.

“Without curses your body will not trim down, Amral”, Valli, wife of Mambully Krishnan said.

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* A popular snack in Kerala, round in shape, made of black gram by grinding it into paste and deep frying.
As Valli joins the talk, it takes on a new turn—they begin to mention by name all the slim people and fat people they know in the locality. Kali Narayanan Nair’s statement that he is concerned only about the ‘nair’ community and the ‘ambalavasis’* provokes Valli to argue that his community is not the highest. There are other communities higher than his, she comments. This leads to a dispute over the superiority of castes and more interesting talks follow. In fact subtle differences can be observed in the vocabulary of the different participants of such informal gatherings where a variety of topics were discussed and of which Madhavikkutty comments thus:

"The kitchen and the surroundings of Nalappat house were always lively with such quarrels. Especially after ammamma went upstairs for her afternoon siesta, sitting on the steps on the northern side, I used to listen to their words"³ (79-80).

The use of common man’s language and different dialects forms an essential feature of Kamala Das’s Malayalam works. In this respect she stands at par with writers like Wordsworth who were to a large extent instrumental in directing the attention of the academia towards the study of dialects in the nineteenth century.

It is very interesting to have a quick glance of how dialect studies of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century have given way to

* Some other castes like the ‘varrier’, ‘marar’ etc who carry on hereditary work in the temples and treated as higher caste similar to the nair community
sociolinguistics of the present. Present day sociolinguistics is often referred to as urban dialectology, quantitative sociolinguistics etc because it forms a major part of sociolinguistics although it includes other topics as well. The dialectologists of the previous years concentrated mainly on collecting facts about geographically distributed and mostly rural varieties of language. Their goal was mainly tracing the development of modern languages from earlier varieties. Practitioners of urban dialectology, on the other hand, have been trying to analyze the features of urban varieties with a view to correlating them with social factors. They conceive of their work as one of the several ways of doing linguistics. In the words of Trudgill, modern research on the subject:

[...] is concerned to learn more about language, and to investigate topics such as the mechanisms of linguistic change, the nature of linguistic variability, and the structure of linguistic systems. All work in this category is aimed ultimately at improving linguistic theory and at developing our understanding of the nature of language[---]. (… *Patterns*…11)

The work done by dialectologists served to assert the social significance of language; but apart from that not much work proceeded in this direction. It took some more time before the subject grew out of its infancy and developed in to a fully-fledged discipline.
Most of the development in sociolinguistics has taken place since the late 1960s. In the recent decades there has sprung up a widespread interest in the subject owing to the realization that sociolinguistics can throw much light on the nature of language and the nature of society. The discipline is developing along new lines and it is concerned more with the study of languages of urban societies. Thus many of the old concepts have been redefined in tune with the changing language scenario.

Many of the nineteenth century linguists were chiefly concerned with the documentation of historical processes leading to the evolution of languages and they differed in the source materials they made use of in their studies. One group of linguists made use of manuscript remains of extinct languages or literary texts, inscriptions or documents throwing light on the earlier stages of modern literary languages. Their method of tracing the development of modern languages from earlier prehistoric varieties of protolanguages was very much similar to the method adopted by biological scientists in studying the evolution of animal organisms.

A second group of linguists took up the direct study of oral practices of peasant communities and tribal societies who, according to them, provided living proof of evolutionary processes. They turned away from written documents for the empirical investigation of actual speech. Dialectologists oriented in this direction launched in to a series of field surveys in which
peasant speech was studied either through mail questionnaires or directly through fieldwork by investigators who often covered many miles on foot in order to collect dialect samples through direct methods.

These methods of investigation had many limitations; but they served to demonstrate that language is basically a social institution and that social factors are very important in language change, thus disproving earlier ideas of biological or geographical determinism.

In the words of Winfred P. Lehmann:

One of the contributions of dialect geography to the present lies in making us aware of the great variety in language. Through the diversity and wealth of forms it has disclosed, dialect geography has broadened greatly our views of language. Historical grammars no longer treat languages as single strata, but rather as complexes composed of numerous data. A given speaker masters some of these. But the complete language is discernible only as one collects material from a variety of speakers. (126-7)

Lehmann adds:

But even the early dialect geographers went on to explore the geographically varying strata of language. Subsequent study
aroused concern for strata determined also by social, functional and occupational differences. In this way a view of language more complex than that of the founders of historical linguistics has been contributed to historical linguistics by the study of dialect geography. Contemporary study of language variation according to geographical, occupational, and social groups is carried out in the field of sociolinguistics. (127)

Thus, it can be seen that the mapping of dialects based on regional variation has been traditionally known as dialect geography and it has employed many assumptions and methods from another branch of linguistics known as historical linguistics. According to dialect geographers, the dialects of a language are created as the speakers distance themselves from one another over time and space. In course of time, the differentiation of a language into dialects reaches such an extent that the speakers are no longer intelligible to one another; this results in the origin of new languages from the dialects. This is how, Latin, over a long period of time developed into many languages like French, Spanish, and Italian. This kind of differentiation takes in to account only the two factors, time and space. The British and American varieties or dialects of English are separated by a few centuries of political independence and by the Atlantic Ocean. Similarly Northumbrian and Cockney English are set apart by nearly three hundred miles and many centuries.
Traditionally dialect geographers attempted to mark their findings on dialect atlases. The geographical boundaries of the distribution of a particular linguistic feature was shown by a line on the map known as isogloss. On either side of the isogloss, different pronunciations of a certain word are used for e.g., if bath is pronounced with the first vowel sound of father on one side, it is said with the first vowel sound of cat on the other side. When different linguistic features are mapped in this way, sometimes the isoglosses crisscross, producing a bundle of isoglosses at certain points. Such a bundle is often said to mark a dialect boundary. One such bundle crosses the south of France from east to west (Grenoble to Bordeaux) with words like chandelle, chanter, and chaud beginning with a sh sound to the north and a k sound to the south.

Quite often it is seen that the dialect boundary coincides with some geographical or political factor, e.g., a mountain ridge, a river, or the boundary of an old principality or diocese. Isoglosses also show that a particular set of linguistic features appears to be spreading from one location, a focal area, into neighbouring areas. Places like London and Boston are obviously focal areas whereas Devon the extreme south west of England is a relic area as it shows characteristics of being unaffected by changes occurring in the neighbouring areas.
In America, from the early decades of the twentieth century, until the emergence of Chomsky’s generative grammar, mainstream linguistics was chiefly concerned with the rapid and efficient description of a large number of dying native American languages. The descriptive linguist saw language as an entity existing outside the realm of the social structure. The descriptive study of a language provided information based on its structure stated largely in terms of linguistic units. In such structural description, the speaker, the listener, the theme, and the broader contexts of its use were not regarded relevant for structural description. Use of different styles of speech in case of a monolingual and use of different language varieties and styles in case of multilingual was not considered something to be noticed by a linguist. The descriptive linguist was satisfied with preparing an account of the language variety an individual spoke; it was none of his concern as to why an individual spoke different speech styles or language varieties. It did not occur to the linguist that use of a language or different registers or styles of it formed a system, which could be disentangled via the social structure. The study of meaning was also excluded from the scope of linguistics.

The second half of the twentieth century is marked by a renewed interest in the study of language in its socio-cultural context sparked off by a controversy over Chomskyan principles related to the autonomy of language. Chomskyan linguistics was built on the autonomy of the syntax and it had the competence-performance dichotomy as one of its strong pillars. Beatriz R.
Lavandera in her essay, "The Study of Language in its Socio-cultural Context" assesses the situation thus: "It does not seem far-fetched to hold Chomsky indirectly responsible for the accelerated development of sociolinguistics and ethnolinguistics at the end of the 1960 and for the emphasis laid upon pragmatics and discourse analysis in the mid 1970" (1).

Dichotomies like langue-parole and competence-performance as formulated by De Saussure and Noam Chomsky respectively, need a little more elaboration, as they are crucial in understanding how descriptive linguistics gradually paved the way for 'socially realistic linguistics' (Labov The Linguistic Variable... 14). Throughout the ages linguists have been in search of the idealized, pure form of language amidst the wide variety used by individuals. De Saussure, the Swiss linguist believed that the pure, homogeneous system of language existed in the 'collective mind' of the community and for Chomsky it was more abstract – it existed in the mind of the ideal speaker-hearer. Chomsky rejects Saussure's ideas of langue as a body of material or an inventory of ideas from which the individual speaker selects his parole. Instead Chomsky sees language as consisting of the speaker, or hearer's innate knowledge of his language (competence) and his actual use of language in concrete situations (performance).

According to Chomsky, competence is an underlying generative process, which will find ever more possible acts of performance. Although
very little is really known of the process and how it is achieved, the example of the five-year-old producing sentences he has not heard before suggests the possibility of an internal grammar, which permits the formation of new material. In the words of Basil Bernstein:

Chomsky neatly severs the study of the rule system of language from the study of the social rules, which determine their contextual use. He does this by making a distinction between competence and performance. *Competence* refers to the child's tacit understanding of the rule system, performance relates to the essential social use to which the rule system is put. *Competence* refers to man abstracted from contextual constraints. *Performance* refers to man in the grip of the contextual constraints, which determine his speech acts. (160)

Saussure, who first called language as a 'social fact', meant that every language is a social product and that every society constitutes itself through language. But Saussure never bothered to study the social side of language; on the other hand he was interested in studying language as a structural entity with its own laws.

Saussurean concept was that *parole* or language in use by different individuals was too varied to permit study and only *langue* could be studied. But operational difficulty arose when descriptive linguists began to study
*langue* because *langue* was not available to direct observation by the senses. *Langue* was stored in the 'collective consciousness' of the speech community and what could be observed was the *parole* only. An empirical approach meant direct observation of language in actual use and so a strict application of Saussure's dictum became an impossibility for the descriptive linguist who found *parole, performance, or speech or usage* too variable to be described. The sociologists who studied language as part of society and culture were chiefly concerned with language in actual use and so they fell apart from any theory or study that did not give due importance to *parole* or *performance*. Lavandera comments upon the situation thus:

The reaction to Chomsky's position that the systematicity of language is confined to competence took a number of different forms. Some, seeing systematicity outside of competence in Chomsky's narrow use of the term, attempted to extend the notion of competence to cover most of the aspects that Chomsky ascribed to performance. An example is Hymes's 'communicative competence' (Models...) which he defined as the knowledge of the abstract rules of a language required to produce sound / meaning correspondences and the ability to use those correspondences between sound, meaning and form in socially and culturally appropriate ways. On the other hand some saw system in performance as well and began to develop
theories specifically of the former. But whichever path was taken, a growing core of investigators was united in the conviction that the Chomskyan paradigm was too narrow to accommodate most of the interesting questions about language.

(1)

Many linguists of the period came forward with the argument that an 'asocial' linguistics is not worthwhile and that meaningful insights into language can be gained only if such matters as use and variation are included as part of the data which must be explained in an adequate linguistic theory; an adequate theory of language must have something to say about the uses of language. A recognition of linguistic variation implies that language is not just an abstract object of study. It is something that people use for all sorts of communicative purposes. Thus there arose new ways of studying language based on its use and not as a mere object.

Some of the leading figures that contributed to the growth of socio linguistics as a discipline in its own right are: Edward Sapir, Benjamin Lee Whorf, Leonard Bloomfield, Malinowsky and J.R. Firth. Edward Sapir is perhaps the first linguist of the century to state that man's view of his environment is conditioned by the native language he uses. Sapir's views on language were corroborated by Benjamin Lee Whorf, whose comparative study of European languages and the American Indian language Hopi
provided him with sufficient material in support of his views. The hypothesis, frequently referred to as the 'Sapir-Whorf hypothesis' argues that speakers' native languages set up series of categories which act as a kind of grid through which they perceive the world, and constrain the way in which they categorize and conceptualize different phenomena. A language can affect a society by influencing or even controlling the worldview of its speakers. But this view about language has been very much disputed; less controversial is the relationship that operates in the opposite direction—the effect of society on language. In fact there are two aspects of the hypothesis, which have been widely discussed: one is 'linguistic determinism' and the other 'linguistic relativity'. Linguistic determinism views language as determining man's knowledge and understanding. This means that human beings cannot imagine a kind of knowledge, which is not encoded in their language. Linguistic relativity proposes that different speakers experience the world differently in so far as the languages they speak differ structurally. All observers are not led by the same physical evidence to the same picture of the universe, unless their linguistic backgrounds are similar (Jane H. Hill1). This is how Whorf expressed his view on the relationship between language and thought:

[---] the background linguistic system (in other words the grammar) of each language is not merely a reproducing instrument for voicing ideas but rather is itself the shaper of ideas, the programme and guide for the individual's mental
activity, for his analysis of impressions, for his synthesis of his mental stock in trade. Formulation of ideas is not an independent process, strictly rational in the old sense, but is part of a particular grammar and differs, from slightly to greatly, between different grammars. We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native language. 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 has to be organized by our minds — and this means largely by the linguistic system in our minds [...]. We are thus introduced to a new principle of relativity, which holds that all observers are not led by the same physical evidence to the same picture of the universe, unless their linguistic backgrounds are similar, or can in some way be calibrated. (26)

Whorf here talks about how our thinking is affected by the grammar of our language. The effect of vocabulary on thought is perhaps more obvious; but it is difficult to accept the claim of Sapir and Whorf that linguistic experience is the only kind of experience that influences our thought processes. The phrase ‘linguistic determinism‘ as framed by Sapir and Whorf implies that our language provides the only framework of ideas within which we can think. Many have disputed this view arguing that there are many
concepts independent of language just as those we learned as babies before we started to speak towards the end of the first year of life. The Whorfian hypothesis still remains unproved and attempts to relate language structure and man’s thinking or views of the world have not been successful so far.

Sarah Joseph, a very well known woman writer of Kerala, emphasizes the relationship between language and culture thus:

When a new word enters in to a language, it will infuse a new culture and life-style in to that society. These changes may not always be positive. For example, the introduction of the word ‘kanyadanam’ in to Malayalam brought about far-reaching changes in the marital relations in Kerala where a more liberal ‘sambandam’ form of man-woman relation was prevailing. At the level of language this was part of growing domination of Sanskrit over Malayalam, but it was also demonstrative of invasion of the male-dominated Brahminical culture on Kerala (The Hindu 15 November 2005).

‘Sambandam’ practised in Kerala was a sort of marital relationship in which it was more of a contract between the husband and the wife and it was more liberal in nature. But in the concept of ‘kanyadanam’ her father is gifting the woman to the man and she is not equal in status to the husband. The ‘sambandam’ form of relationship as practised by the nair community of
Kerala that followed the matrilineal family system had as its basis mutual understanding and its spirit was a very positive one without any traces of compulsion on either side. But the Brahmin culture that followed patriarchy insisted on denying the basic rights to women. Sarah Joseph sees it as invasion of brahminical culture upon Kerala in gradually wiping off ‘sambandam’ and introducing ‘kanyadanam’. wherein a girl is treated as a gift to man irrespective of her wish. This is an example to show the mutual interference of language and culture. But it remains vague as to whether it is language that has influenced culture or the other way.

J.R. Firth, the linguist and Malinowsky, the anthropologist have contributed immensely towards the growth of sociolinguistics in Britain. Firth’s claim was that he and his group studied language as part of the social process and that a ‘key concept’ to their technique was the concept of the ‘context of situation’ formulated by Malinowsky. They saw meaning in terms of function in context and rejected all approaches to the study of language, which sought to exclude the study of meaning. The early communication theories had reduced languages to mere transmission of information whereas in the functionalist approach of linguists like Firth and Malinowsky, the context of situation is crucial and must include the participants in speech events, the action taking place and other relevant features. According to this view, a given language utterance is seen as appropriate to a certain use within

*Kanya* stands for virgin girl, *daanam* means offer as a gift.
a certain cultural context; in a different linguistic and cultural setting, adjustments have to be made. Firth believed that this context of situation could be studied not as a vague, shifting background to a language event, but more vigorously in terms of related categories at a different level from grammatical categories but rather of the same abstract nature. He did not elaborate but did suggest that such categories could be:

a) the relevant features of participants, persons and personalities.
   1) the verbal action of the participants.
   2) the non-verbal action of the participants.

b) the relevant objects.

c) the effect of the verbal action.

Leonard Bloomfield in his book Language discusses the topic of different speech communities and in it he clarifies our understanding of the mechanisms by which social factors affect language change. According to him linguistic diversity in human societies is directly related to density of communication or to the amount of verbal interaction among speakers. Previous scholars had attempted to find direct correlations between language and various environmental factors; but Bloomfield postulates an intervening level of human communication, which mediates between linguistic and non-linguistic phenomena. According to him political, economic and even geographical features are not directly reflected in speech. They affect
language only to the extent that they can be shown to channel verbal communication among speakers, causing certain individuals to have more verbal contact with some than with others and thereby influencing the rate at which innovations diffuse. Bloomfield writes:

Imagine a chart with a dot for every speaker in the community and imagine that every time any speaker uttered a sentence an arrow were drawn in to the chart printing from his dot to the dot representing each one of his hearers. At the end of a given period of time, say 70 years, that chart would show us the density of communication in the community...sub groups are separated by lines of weakness in this net of oral communication. (46-47)

All the linguists mentioned above contributed to the increasing importance of social factors in language and language study; but they could not initiate any movement in linguistics prompting the acceptance of linguistic variability as a very important factor. Even Sapir was not prepared to incorporate the element of variability in to his study of language. Sapir and the generation that came after him did not initiate any movement devoted to including the variability factor of language. Sapir who had come up with the epigrammatic conclusion, “Unfortunately or luckily, no grammar is tyrannically consistent. All grammars leak.” (38) adopted in practice a very
strong form of the *axiom of categoricity*. J.K. Chambers defines the *axiom of categoricity* as “the simplifying assumption that data for linguistic analysis must be regularized to eliminate real-world variability” (12).

When linguists observed the presence of variants in language they regarded them either as belonging to different coexistent linguistic systems or as unpredictably free substitutes. The variant forms used by people were never discussed or examined critically and were treated merely as random fluctuations. Those who believed in the notion of coexistent linguistic systems held the view that speakers maintained separate phonologies and grammar that gave them access to more than one code but switching over to the variants should not be sporadic. Alternating between the different codes should not, in principle, take place as long as the conditions surrounding the speech event remain unchanged. But, in effect, many speakers are observed to be switching over from one variant to another in the same sentence itself. Large group of people resort to this kind of variant mixing in similar circumstances. The linguistic behaviour of such people provides evidence for a single system in which variants coexist rather than the coexistence of different linguistic systems.

According to Coulmas, sociolinguistics has replaced categoricity with frequency, i.e. the frequency of occurrence of variant features of language use in a given speech community. He observes thus:
Instead of categorizing a certain pronunciation or a certain construction as either belonging to or not belonging to a language L, sociolinguistics would measure the frequencies with which such features and constructions occurred in variety X compared with variety Y. The fact that speech communities and individual speakers had a wide range of possible speech forms at their command was recognized as an essential rather than a haphazard condition of the social functioning of language. Discovering systematic patterns underlying the actual occurrences of variant speech forms and relating them to social characteristics of speakers and speech situations turned in to be the major challenge that sociolinguistics set out to confront.

(Sociolinguistics 565)

J.K. Chambers takes up the example of variants like car and automobile to disprove the idea of free variation and to establish that variants are subject to the influence of social factors. Chambers observes thus:

The idea of free variation carries a strong implication as well. If the variants are truly free, that is, if the occurrence of one variant or another is arbitrary, then it must follow a fortiori that the variants cannot be predicted by any factor. Yet the most casual observations of speech show that its variants are
associated with social factors. Discussions of free variations routinely included observations that 'free' variants like *automobile* were used in advertisements because the word had a dignity lacking in its counterpart *car*. In other words, the variants were predictable, at least probabilistically, and not free in any meaningful sense of the word. (14)

Linguistic variables

R.A.Hudson defines a variable as a "collection of alternatives which have something in common"(169). A linguistic variable is a "linguistic unit with two or more variants involved in co variation with other social and / or linguistic variables" (Chambers&Trudgill60). A very commonly cited example is the use of alternative pronunciations for the suffix *-ing* which are represented as (ng): [ŋ] and (ng): [n].

Variables of this kind need to be examined in sociolinguistic terms because other kinds of explanations are irrelevant here. This fact becomes quite clear when we observe that the difference between the same two sounds at the end of *sing* and *sin* does not come under the area of sociolinguistics because they can be classified as lexical items. A person who is familiar with the meaning and use of these words knows very well why it is *sing* on one occasion and *sin* on another. So also, the choice between the words *sing* and *sings* comes under the rules of grammar. The social factor has absolutely no
relevance in the study of the choice of these sounds. Linguists explain these facts without looking at the social context or the social variables. So it has to be emphasized that linguistic variables that require a sociolinguistic explanation only can be called as ‘sociolinguistic variables.’

Hudson identifies different types of sociolinguistic variables based on the level of language (phonetics, phonology, morphology, lexicon, syntax) at which the variants are different.

1. Phonetic variables

Certain phonological patterns have different phonetic realizations. The English phoneme /t/ has different pronunciations (glottal stop, an r-like flap, a d-like tap, alveolar stop, alveolar aspirate with an s-like ending and so on). All these count as pronunciations of the same phoneme.

Phonological variables

The same lexical item has alternative phonological structures in a good number of cases like the use of house and happy with or without h.

Morphological variables

In places like Norwich, it is very commonly observed that present-tense verbs are uttered with or without the suffix –s. Quite often the local form is she sing, but people who use this also use the standard form she sings.
Lexical variables

Sometimes, two or more lexical items express the same meaning or in other words, are partial synonyms. Compound pronouns like *nobody* and *somebody* have exactly the same meaning as the corresponding forms *none* and *someone*.

Syntactic variables

Different syntactic structures sometimes express the same meaning; but just like the lexical variables they also pose difficulty and quite often other disciplines might offer better explanations than sociolinguistics. Sometimes, it is possible that a complete explanation may involve a combination of sociolinguistics with other disciplines like psycholinguistics and discourse analysis. The content of a sentence like ‘The criminal was apprehended by a policeman who happened to be passing at the time’, could also be expressed as ‘A policeman who happened to be passing at the time apprehended the criminal’. Here, the choice of the passive/active can be explained in different ways – The sociolinguist might view them from the point of view of differing styles, the passive being relatively formal. The psycholinguist might explain it in terms of the processing load or ease of comprehension arising out of the final position of the long phrase about the policeman. The discourse analyst has yet other comments to make; he might try to relate it to the writer’s choice of the criminal as the topic, i.e. might give
importance to what the sentence is about. In fact, all the explanations given above are right in this case: considerations of style, of processing difficulty and of topicality all contribute to the choice of the passive. Although other explanations are quite relevant in cases like this, the sociolinguist can rightly treat such cases as sociolinguistic variables.

William Labov is the pioneer who systematically investigated speech and quantitatively treated speech data; but he was not the first person to study linguistic variables in a speech community. A very good work in the field had already been done by Louis Gauchat in a Swiss village at the beginning of the twentieth century and he noted down the clear differences between individual speakers and came out with figures on how many people used which variants. Since he could not collect continuous texts, he could not produce text based figures also.

Another study by Kindaichi broke new ground in the sense that it was done in a city (all traditional studies were done in rural areas) and it was designed so as to study the effect of sex and social class (two of the social parameters considered as most important in later work) on language. Kindaichi's study related to the use of the linguistic variable /g/ as used in the middle of a word (for example, /kago/, 'card'). The traditional pronunciation is [ŋ], (like the/ n/ in finger); but Kindaichi noticed that young people were replacing the [ŋ] by [g] and he set out to study the pronunciation of seventy
high school students of Tokyo by asking them to read a list of words while he noted their pronunciation. His study came up with the revelation that the change in the pronunciation was being led by middle class girls.

This was followed by two American studies: the first one was in a semi rural community in New England and it focused on how children pronounced the *ing* suffix in words like *talking*, whether they chose [n] or [ŋ]. The study undertaken by the leading British sociologist John L. Fischer was prompted by his accidental observation of glaring inconsistencies in the speech of the New England school children. In fact the sociologist Fischer began his work as part of a child-rearing project, but gradually he came to be more involved in the peculiarities of their speech. Their alternations between *running* and *runnin'* (pronouncing the participle differently on different occasions) led Fischer to study the matter more deeply; but the linguists of the period told him that it was merely "free variation". Fischer did not feel satisfied by the explanation given by the linguists and he set out determined to correlate linguistic variation with social factors. Fischer's research turned out to be successful to a very large extent and his correlation of language variants with independent variables like 'social class' and 'sex' proved that the notion of "free" variation is baseless. Fischer viewed the situation thus:

*Free variation is of course a label, not an explanation. It does not tell us where the variants came from or why the speakers...*
use them in different proportions, but is rather a way of excluding such questions from the scope of immediate enquiry. Historically I presume that one could investigate the spread of one of these variants into the territory of another through contact and migration, and this would constitute one useful sort of explanation. However another sort of explanation is possible in terms of current factors, which lead a given child in given circumstances to produce one of the variants rather than another. (47)

In Fischer's statement we find the most fundamental motive for sociolinguistics, and the basis for sociolinguistic analysis. Fischer's study revealed that \([\eta]\) was used more by girls than by boys, more by 'model' boys than by 'typical' boys and more in formal situations than in informal ones. The second study was in North Carolina and its focus was the use of \([r]\) in words like car and card. The results showed the clear influence of social class on pronunciation; but it was complicated since it was found that high social status was linked to both the use of \([r]\) and to its non-use. The results suggested the co-existence of two competing standards in the society. (Hudson 148-50)

In fact, the term 'sociolinguistics' had been coined long before any research had been taken up in the area of 'linguistic variation and social
correlates'. Haver. C. Currie, a poet and philosopher of the mid twentieth century observed that most of the linguists of the conventional schools had accepted the social function of language but none bothered to include it as a major research topic. Currie used the word 'socio-linguistics' to refer to the study of American English undertaken by Mencken in his popular work *The American Language*. Currie praised Mencken for his commendable work in the area of socio-linguistics i.e. consideration of the social significance of English as spoken in the United States. The term sociolinguistics suggested by Currie had not been accepted immediately; but later when it came in to general use after about a decade or so nobody remembered him or gave him credit for the coinage. It was William Labov's study of the Lower East side of New York city looking for dialectal variation that persuaded other linguists to delve deep in to the field of sociolinguistic study and realize that the linguistic variable and the social structure are so intimately related.

Thus it is seen that as William Labov began his work in the island of Martha’s Vineyard off the New England coast (1961), quantitative approach to speech had already begun. Labov took a step ahead by making use of the tape recorder to record continuous speech and it was of immense use in assessing how far consistent the speakers were in their speech. Most of Labov's work has been devoted to the study of living languages, especially that of colloquial English. This kind of work is quite often known as *Labovian sociolinguistics*. In this kind of work the sociolinguist focuses on a
predetermined list of linguistic variables – speech elements that have different realizations. Mostly they are words, which have more than one pronunciation. For each variable, there is a list of variants and the investigator approaches different people talking in similar circumstances.

Labov observed that many people pronounced the words house and hit with an initial [h], whereas many others never made use of it. Presumably they belong to different linguistic systems; but such an explanation can not be given in the case of speakers who sometimes use the [h] for house and hit and at other times do not. There are people who say (I didn't eat any apples) and some who say (I didn't eat no apples) and many people alternate between these two uses. The notation that is commonly used to represent these facts is given thus: Cases of the (h) variable where [h] is pronounced, is written as (h): [h]. If (h) variable is absent, it is written as (h): ø (ø) is the symbol normally used in linguistics to represent 'zero' or the absence of some element. Labov and others found that linguistic variation could not be easily related to social variables. Different variants of the same variable were quite often seen in the same text and based on it, texts could be arranged on a continuous scale. Labov's study revealed that (no/any): [no] constituted more than 80% of the cases. (...) Inner City 181). Similarly social variables themselves were also found to be continuous rather than discrete – people are more or less wealthy, or manly or educated rather than falling in to clearly
discrete social groups. These factors called for a quantitative treatment of the data, using appropriate techniques.

Labov's first work in Martha's Vineyard proved the existence of systematic differences between speakers in the use of certain linguistic variables. After this he worked with a very different community in New York, trying to test some hypotheses, which he had already formulated about the use of the linguistic variable (r). This work, which had already been done in North Carolina, concerned the presence or absence–(r): [r] versus (r):\( \phi \) of the consonantal (r) sound in words like farm and fair, where the next sound is not a vowel in the same word. The New Yorkers were gradually shifting from the (r):\( \phi \) to (r): [r] and Labov's prediction was that the proportion of (r):\( \phi \) would be highest in the speech of older people.

Labov used a very simple method to collect data. He walked around three department stores in New York asking shop assistants where some goods were available. The three department stores – Saks, Macey's and S.Klein were clearly demarcated by the social class groups to which they catered (high, middle, and low respectively). In fact he knew that he could get them on the fourth floor. His aim was to observe how each assistant would utter the words 'fourth floor'. He would then lean forward and pretend not to have heard the answer thus making the assistant say it again. He selected the words fourth and floor because the (r) is followed by a consonant in fourth but
not in floor. By selecting these two words he could very well test the hypothesis about the influence of 'linguistic context'. By making them repeat the answer he could test the hypothesis about the amount of 'attention to speech' as the assistants would be more careful about the second utterance. He also wanted to study about the influence of 'age' by making a rough guess about the age of each assistant. Labov also could test the hypothesis about 'social status' by comparing the stores with each other as they served different categories of customers. Within each store he made distinctions among the assistants – between floorwalkers, sales staff and stock boys – and even between different floors within each store, as higher status goods are generally stocked on higher floors.

Labov noted down the relevant details of each assistant secretly after the meeting only, so that they never realized that they were being subjected to examination or that it was part of a research. This method proved to be highly effective and speedy also; Labov could collect relevant ‘texts’ from 264 subjects and identify the variants in just six and a half hours. As the figures were processed, most of the hypotheses of Labov were found to be true. As predicted by him the use of (r): [r] decreased from high status to low status store. Similarly, Labov also studied the influence of another factor i.e. attention to speech given by the participants. He noticed that careful repetition of the utterance nearly always increased the r-pronunciation and
pronunciation of the *r* was found more often in *floor* than in *fourth*. Regarding the element of the age factor, Labov reached the conclusion that members of the highest and lowest social groups tend not to change their pronunciation after it becomes fixed in adolescence but members of the middle social groups sometimes do it because of their desire to rise in social position. The results as formulated by Labov are represented diagrammatically as follows:

![Diagram showing percentage of *r* pronunciation in *fourth* and *floor* by social class and store.](image)

New York (*r*). Percentage of (*r*): [r] in first (I) and second (II) utterances of *fourth* (white) and *floor* (hatched) by assistants in three department stores (based on Labov 1972a: 52)
Another work done by Labov, in New York city, on the social stratification of English took him to the conclusion that the incidence of one or other of a set of alternating variables in a person’s speech depends on either of two non-linguistic variables. 1) The person’s position in the social hierarchy as defined by his income and education. 2) The formality of the speech situation defined by the degree to which the participants were made aware that they were participating as informants in a programme of linguistic survey and research.

Thus it can be seen that there have been two different approaches to the study of dialects – dialect geography and urban sociolinguistics. Dialect geography is also called as regional dialectology, area linguistics, linguistic geography and traditional dialectology. Dialect geography has been mainly concerned with collecting data for linguistic atlases, which are collections of maps, each showing the geographical distribution of some linguistic variant at the level of phonetics, phonology, morphology, lexicon or semantics. Describing the speech of elderly informants was an essential part of dialect geography because those linguists believed that such speech would throw light on the earlier varieties of languages. The approach of regional dialectology has been mainly diachronic; it is more concerned with looking for the stamp of the older ‘standard language’ in a dialect variety of the present or ‘to focus on the forms themselves and their cognates rather than on the verbal habits of the speakers that use them. Present day sociolinguistics, with urban dialectology as one of its key areas, on the other hand has tended
to adopt a synchronic approach; it collects samples of language at some particular point in time and tries to correlate the linguistic variations with extra-linguistic criteria. It seeks to describe a language state rather than see it from the perspective of a changing system. Of course there have been a few dialectological studies without the historical bias; but most of the studies are historically oriented. Sociolinguistics differs from dialectology in another respect too. Dialectology treats dialects and languages as clear cut monolithic structures having certain linguistic features, between which there are dividing lines very similar to the ones seen on maps. Sociolinguistics is not inclined to study languages as existing independently and distinguishable from other languages. Its concern is the social group and the linguistic variables it uses seeking to correlate these variables with the traditional demographic units of the social sciences. Correlating linguistic variables with such units like age, sex, socio economic class membership, regional grouping and status of the language users is the focus of its study.

**Variation of language forms the most basic tenet of sociolinguistics.** Language variation and social stratification forms one important area in sociolinguistics; some other topics like language planning, language birth and death, language and socialization, dialect study, bilingualism/multilingualism, etc need a mention in this context because they are topics that come under the ambit of sociolinguistics and gaining more and more attention. These topics have been introduced briefly in different chapters of
this thesis at suitable places. Although the topic 'language planning' has no direct relevance in the context of the sociolinguistic study of an author, considering its importance in the field of sociolinguistics it is briefly mentioned.

Language Planning

It is a matter of common knowledge that plenty of expressive choices are available to a speaker of language who wants to communicate with the people around him. The situation gets more complex if the speakers mix many varieties of a language or different languages because the choice of one language variety or another produces added meanings. Such choices serve to identify the speakers with some particular group, loyalty to a heritage language, or even reveal the attitude towards the interlocutor etc.

The selection of language alternatives carry a lot of social implications and so it is not a matter of surprise that efforts are made to influence the way in which language is used. The fact that alternatives exist makes language planning a possible and necessary thing. Alternatives of language are available at all levels of language use like every day communication, official communications and public functions. Planning has no relevance in casual or day-to-day communication between individuals; but it becomes extremely important while enacting legislation regarding the use of language at the official or national level or as a medium of education. In addition to filling the
communication needs, language can serve symbolic functions just as being a unifying or separatist force in a community. Thus political, social, and economic concerns become very important in language planning.

Language planning is an area with undefined boundaries. Some see all work committed to changes within a language as language planning. The present trend is to view the topic from a very wide perspective of language problems and correction in general. Even a speaker's mis-statement in a discourse, to the choice of official languages in a multilingual nation comes under the umbrella of language planning. According to Rubin, "language planning becomes one kind of language correction, done in a conscious, planned manner by groups authorized to carry out the change" (qtd.in Donna Christian 196). Donna Christian defines language planning thus: "language planning is an explicit and systematic effort to resolve language problems and achieve related goals through institutionally organized intervention in the use and usage of languages" (197). She tries to illustrate her point through clear-cut examples like the following: Prior to independence, India's population spoke a number of different native languages but English was the official language of the country. On getting independence, the Indian leaders did not like to retain English as the official language; they chose Hindi as the official language to underscore the new national identity. This kind of governmental
policy formulation of assigning official status to language is one form of language planning.

In Eastern Africa, many dialects of Swahili had been used for communication in the late nineteenth century. Britain, the colonial power recognized the position of the language and formulated an educational policy for its use. But Swahili had many different dialects and a commission was appointed to choose a dialect to standardize. The commission chose the Zanzibar dialect and ventured to promote its standardization. Such attempts were quite successful and more so in the written forms. Swahili later became an official language in many independent East African nations including Tanzania. Thus it is seen that language planning intervenes in the normal course of events to develop a standard form of the language. Donna Christian concludes her study of language planning thus:

Language planning, as an explicit effort to influence language use and usage, must respond to a variety of demands. The desired outcomes are most often political, social or even economic in character, and language is a means to these ends. However the fact that language planning is not primarily a linguistic activity does not mean that there is no role for linguists. A linguist who understands the socio-cultural context of language behaviour is in fact better informed to make
recommendations concerning the direction and implementation of changes that will lead to political or social outcomes than those who focus on the outcomes alone (208).

**Micro sociolinguistics and Macro sociolinguistics**

Sociolinguistics is a meeting ground for linguists and social scientists, some of whom seek to understand the social aspects of language while others are primarily concerned with the linguistic aspects of society. Thus, there have come up two centers of gravity, known respectively as micro- and macro- sociolinguistics. These represent different orientations and research agendas, micro issues being more likely to be investigated by linguists, dialectologists and others in language-centered fields, whereas macro issues are more frequently taken up by sociologists and social psychologists.

The general view regarding the distinction between micro-sociolinguistics or sociolinguistics and macro-sociolinguistics or sociology of language is this: Sociolinguistics is the study of language in relation to society whereas sociology of language is the study of society in relation to language. The difference between the two lies chiefly in the point of emphasis, whether the learner is interested more in language or society.

Ronald Wardhaugh distinguishes the two in the following words:
sociolinguistics is concerned with investigating the relationships between language and society with the goal being a better understanding of the structure of language and of how languages function in communication; the equivalent goal in the sociology of language is trying to discover how social structure can be better understood through the study of language, e.g., how certain linguistic features serve to characterize particular social arrangement. (12).

Micro-sociolinguistics investigates how social structure influences the way people talk and how social attributes like class, gender and age are related to language varieties. Topics like language planning, language attitude, language birth, death or to put it shortly what societies do with their language comes within the area of micro-sociolinguistics.

Wardhaugh, although he accepts this sort of distinction, is of the view that it is not possible to make a sharp distinction between the two because they overlap at many levels. In his view rigid micro-macro compartmentalization seems quite contrived and unnecessary in the present state of knowledge about the complex interrelationships between linguistic and social structures.

Sociolinguistics has widened in to many areas; but this researcher has not dealt with all of them because they are very vast in content and has no
direct relevance in the context of the topic of the present work. Language Planning is one such area mentioned in this chapter and some other topics are also mentioned at various parts of the thesis.
Notes


2. "മത്സര മുറിക്കുന്ന മാത്ര പൈരി അക്കാലത്ത് കണ്ടേയെ രൂപപ്പെടുന്ന കാരണം അതി. അങ്ങും മൂവരിനു രൂപം നൽകുകയാണ്" എന്ന സ്വരൂപത്തിൽ തുടരുന്നു.

"ഭാഗത്തെ എന്ന് അവാം കണ്ടേയെ. അനുഭവത്താലുള്ള സ്വയം കണ്ടെ ശ്രീമാതായ നിവാരണ അതി. അതി കണ്ടേയെ അക്കാലങ്ങളുടെ അവരുടെ സൃഷ്ടി. സുഖദാനത്തിലും ആയിരം പലപ്പോഴും, അവരുടെ ആയിരം അത്രാത്രം അവരുടെ ആയിരം", അവിഷ്കാരമായി ഉള്ളു.

"ഭാഗത്തെ കണ്ടെ പ്രകാരം നിഴൽ കണ്ടേയെ സ്വയംത്രരുടെ ഭരണത്തെക്കാൾ കുറഞ്ഞു, . . ." എന്ന സ്വരൂപത്തിൽ തുടരുന്നു.

"മത്സര എന്ന് രൂപം കാണുന്നു? മത്സര മൂവരിനു സ്വയംത്രരുടെ കാഴ്ചയാണ്. എന്നാണെങ്കിലും മത്സരം കാഴ്ചയാണെങ്കിൽ? മനിഷികൾ മന്ദിറ മനിഷി

"നിഴലിലേ മുകൾ പ്രകാരം കുറഞ്ഞു സ്വയംത്രരുടെ ഭരണത്തിൽ അന്ത്യം അത്രാത്രം കുറഞ്ഞു ഭരണം കാഴ്ച. . . ." അവിഷ്കാരമായി ഉള്ളു.

"മുകൾ മുകൾ തീരെ പൊളിപ്പുന്ന കുറഞ്ഞു അന്ത്യം ഭരണം കാഴ്ച. . ." അയിരുന്നു

എന്നാണ് മുകൾ പൊളിപ്പിക്കുന്ന ഭരണം മനിഷികൾ എന്നെന്നു
Works cited


