Certain Basic Sociolinguistic Concepts

Chapter III

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The question 'What is Language?' still remains unanswered
Wall work J.F.

Chapter II assigns Sociolinguistics to its rightful place in the history of Linguistics. The recent developments in Linguistics have shown beyond doubt that any study of language has to take in to account the social aspects too. Chapter II looks at the topic of sociolinguistics in greater detail; its beginnings, its present relevance; the major theoreticians who are responsible for its growth and its development in various directions.

Some of the basic assumptions on which the whole edifice of sociolinguistics rests are very relevant in the study of the subject and need to be examined in detail. Sociolinguistics being 'the study of language in relation to society', it is essential that one becomes familiar with certain terms before taking up larger issues connected with the same.

Language

The term 'society' is easily defined as “any group of people who are drawn together for a certain purpose or purposes”(wardhaugh 1). As far as a layman is concerned, this definition suffices; but for the sociolinguist the extent and limits of this very comprehensive term varies with the context. The
term 'language' is even more complex; it encompasses a wide range of possibilities and its elusive nature is attracting more and more researchers to its fold. A very simple definition in the sociologist's view is, "a language is what the members of a particular society speak" (Wardhaugh 1). 'Speech' or 'language' varies from person to person, from place to place and the very same individual is seen to talk differently in different contexts.

These terms, most fundamental to the study of sociolinguistics are found to be extremely problematic to sociolinguists for they are unable to define the terms or find criteria for delimiting the varieties.

Wardhaugh cites the example of census takers in India who find themselves confronted with a wide array of language names when they ask people what language or languages they speak. He observes:

Names are not only ascribed by region, which is what we might expect, but sometimes also by caste, religion, village and so on. Moreover they can change from census to census as the political and social climate of the country changes. (23)

Speakers as well as investigators find it difficult to decide whether variety X is a language, and variety Y is a dialect of language. There are people who view these terms light-heartedly and use the term 'language' to refer to the most common variety and 'dialect' to represent a local non-prestigious variety. But investigators do find themselves in real difficulty in
deciding whether one term should be used rather than the other in certain situations. Einar Haugen has pointed out that language and dialect are ambiguous terms. According to him, the terms 'represent a simple dichotomy in situations that is almost infinitely complex'. He points out that this is not a new development; the confusion regarding the distinction can be traced back to the Ancient Greeks (68) The Greek language used in Ancient Greece was actually a group of distinct local varieties (Ionic, Doric, Attic) descended from a common spoken source through divergence and each variety had its own literary traditions and uses, for example Ionic for history, Doric for choral and lyric works, and Attic for tragedy. Later, Athenian Greek, the Koine—or 'common' language – became the norm for the spoken language as the various spoken varieties converged on the dialect of the major cultural and administrative center. Haugen is of the view that the Greek situation has provided the model for all later usages of the two terms with the resulting ambiguity. Wardhaugh concludes the point thus: Language can be used to refer either to a single linguistic norm or to a group of related norms, and dialect to refer to one of the norms (23-24).

Coming to the French scenario the situation is even more complicated: the French distinguish between un dialecte and un patois. The first one is a regional variety of a language that has an associated literary tradition and the second term is used for a regional variety devoid of such a literary tradition. Patois is considered as something less than a dialect because there is no
literature associated with it. But it should also be mentioned that *dialect* in French, just as *Dialekt* in German cannot be used in connection with the standard language. A speaker of French will never say that standard French is a dialect of French.

The English situation is of course different; although there were times when dialects were not considered on the same level as standard language it is no more so. In the past, the term *dialect* in English had connotations of non-standard or sometimes even sub-standard; but nowadays it is quite commonly heard that standard English is a dialect of English.

Wardhaugh cites many examples of language situations in different countries which adequately explain why it becomes difficult to distinguish between the terms 'language' and 'dialect'. A speaker of the cockney variety of English (generally considered as a substandard variety of English) will find it very difficult to communicate with a native of the Ozark mountains in the United States, although both of them speak the same language, by common notions. But sheer observation of the two varieties spoken would lead anyone into thinking that they should be labelled under different names because they are so well markedly different from each other. Similarly, the question arises whether the French of Quebec is a dialect of standard French or whether it should be regarded as a separate language.

Wardhaugh represents the language situation in China thus:
If we turn our attention to China, we will find that speakers of Cantonese and Mandarin will tell you that they use the same language. However, if one speaker knows only Cantonese and the other only Mandarin, they will not be able to converse with each other: they actually speak different languages, certainly as different as German and Dutch and even Portuguese and Italian. If the speakers are literate, however, they will be able to communicate with each other through a shared writing system. They will almost certainly insist that they speak different dialects of Chinese, not different languages - for to the Chinese a shared writing system and a strong tradition of political, social and cultural unity form essential parts of their definition of language. (28)

Speech Community

The widest context of verbal interaction for sociolinguistic research is usually taken to be the speech community. The study of speech communities has interested linguists for a long time; there has always been a lot of disagreement over exactly what a speech community is. One of the definitions of ‘speech community’ given by John Lyons is as follows:

Speech community: all the people who use a given language (or dialect)(326).
According to this definition, speech communities may overlap (where there are bilingual individuals) and need not have any social or cultural unity. Hudson is of the view that it is possible to delimit speech communities in this sense only to the extent that it is possible to delimit languages and dialects without referring to the community that speaks them.

Charles Hockett defines a speech community as:

"Each language defines a speech community: the whole set of people who communicate with each other, either directly or indirectly, via the common language" (8).

In this definition, the condition of ‘communication within the community’ is added and so if two communities speak the same language but has no contact at all with each other they would be treated as two different speech communities

Leonard Bloomfield views a speech community thus:

"A speech community is a group of people who interact by means of speech" (42).

Such a definition hints at the possibility that the group need not be entirely of people who speak the same language. Some may speak one language and others another language. The definition given by John Gumperz also recognizes such a possibility:
We will define [linguistic community] as a social group which may be either monolingual or multilingual, held together by frequency of social interaction patterns and set off from the surrounding areas by weaknesses in the lines of communication.(28)

Another definition given by Gumperz later, requires that there should be some linguistic differences between the members of the speech community and those outside it:

The speech community: any human aggregate characterised by regular and frequent interaction by means of a shared body of verbal signs and set off from similar aggregates by significant differences in language use. (381)

In these two definitions the emphasis is on communication and interaction and so the question of overlapping of speech communities does not arise much. In the earlier definitions, overlap automatically results from bilingualism.

William Labov has given a different definition of the term, putting the emphasis on shared attitudes and knowledge, rather than on linguistic behaviour:

The speech community is not defined by any marked agreement in the use of language elements, so much as by participation in a
set of shared norms: these norms may be observed in overt types of evaluative behaviour, and by the uniformity of abstract patterns of variation, which are invariant in respect to particular levels of usage. (120)

Dell Hymes and Michael Halliday also have given similar definitions referring to shared norms and abstract patterns of variation rather than to shared speech behaviour. This sort of definition puts emphasis on the speech community as a group of people who feel themselves to be a community in some sense, rather than a group, which only the linguist could know about.

Robert Le Page takes a totally different approach which avoids the term ‘speech community’ altogether and instead refers to groups in society which have distinctive speech characteristics as well as other social characteristics. According to him the groups are those, which the individual speaker perceives to exist, and not necessarily those, which a sociologist might discover by objective methods. Le Page summarises his views in the following words:

Each individual creates the systems for his verbal behaviour so that they shall resemble those of the group or groups with which from time to time he may wish to be identified to the extent that, a) he can identify the groups,
b) he has both opportunity and ability to observe and analyse their behavioural systems,

c) his motivation is sufficiently strong to impel him to choose, and to adapt his behaviour accordingly,

d) he is still able to adapt his behaviour.¹(qtd. in Hudson 26)

R.A.Hudson takes a similar view according to which:

[---]individuals 'locate themselves in a multi dimensional space', the dimensions being defined by the groups they can identify in their society. [---] these groups definitely overlap. For instance a child may identify groups on the basis of sex, age, geography and race, and each grouping contribute something to the particular combination of linguistic items which they select as their own language. (26)

Trying to define a speech community becomes a complex task because it is impossible to identify such a community which has a language in common and nothing else. The question of language invariably interferes with other factors like common culture, history and the like. When such matters are taken note of, it can be observed that any speech community contains parts of several other speech communities. So Hudson is in favour of leaving the decision of identification with communities to the speaker himself because he
is the best person to decide whether he belongs to one group or another by way of speech characteristics as well as other social characteristics.

**Bilingualism/Multilingualism**

Bilingualism is a controversial term; the common meaning ascribed to this term is 'some one with equal and native command of two or more languages'. But this cannot be accepted because such an interpretation excludes the vast majority of cases. According to Bernard Spolsky, “In practice, then, scholars in this field treat bilingualism as a relative rather than an absolute phenomenon, and consider anyone able to produce (or even understand) sentences in more than one language as the proper object of their study” (100).

As Sridhar says:

Multilingualism involving balanced, native like command of all the languages in the repertoire is rather common. Typically, multilinguals have varying degrees of command of the different repertoires. The differences in competence in the various languages might range from command of a few lexical items, formulaic expressions such as greetings, and rudimentary conversational skills all the way to excellent command of the grammar and vocabulary and specialized register and styles.
Multilinguals develop competence in each of the codes to the extent that they need it and for the contexts in which each of the languages is used.(50)

The fact that people know and use more than one language has interested linguists of various sub fields and accordingly the topic is found, treated under the headings of ‘neurolinguistics’ ‘language processing’ ‘second language learning’, ‘pidgin studies’, ‘language death’, ‘language and education’ etc. If the focus of interest of the neurolinguist concerns the speciality of the bilingual brain, language-processing addresses questions like whether the two languages are stored and processed separately. Under second language learning comes the topic of how some people become bilinguals. Speakers of pidgins being bilingual, the topic occupies a definite place under pidgin studies too. Bilinguals who give up on the use of one language in favour of another lead to 'language death', another area in sociolinguistics.

Ronald Wardhaugh is of the opinion that, since words like dialect, language, register, pidgin, creole etc arouse many associations in the listener, a safe and neutral word to use would be code. A code refers to any kind of systems that people use for the purpose of communication. All the terms mentioned above come under the ambit of this neutral term.

It is not rare to find in many parts of the world individuals who make use of more than one code. We see that bilingualism or multilingualism is the
norm in many parts of the world. The indigenous Indians on the border between Colombia and Brazil live in groups called phratries; each phratry comprises five tribes with each tribe making use of a different language. But for the language difference other practices and customs are similar in all respects. Thus we can say that each phratry forms a language group; but at the same time all the people of the tribe are multilinguals because a man must marry outside his language group. The wife is bound to live along with the husband in his tribe and also talk in his language to the children born to them. Thus the first language of the children happens to be taught by the mother for whom the first language invariably is another one. But reports from the place do not reveal any irregularity or abnormality as far as language learning is concerned. It is seen that in any village several languages are used: the language of the men who belong to the tribe, the various languages spoken by women who have come from other tribes and also a wide spread regional ‘trade’ language. Children are born in to this multilingual environment; they are exposed to many numbers of languages. All the people in the community are interested in learning other languages and in the course of their conversation they shift easily from one to another. As Wardhaugh comments:

Multilingualism is a norm in this community. It results from the pattern of marriage and the living arrangements consequent to marriage. Communities are multilingual and no effort is made to suppress the variety of languages that are spoken. It is actually
seen as a source of strength, for it enables the speakers of the various linguistic communities to maintain contact with one another and provides a source for suitable marriage partners for those who seek them. (96)

**Code-switching**

Code-switching is the inevitable consequence of bilingualism/multilingualism. A person who speaks more than one language chooses between them according to circumstances. The main consideration in code-switching is selection of the language known to the person addressed. In a community where every one speaks the same range of languages (community multilingualism) the choice of the code is done according to social rules. Quite often one language is reserved for use at home, and another for the wider community. The choice of language is controlled by rules, which the members of the community learn from experience. Hudson gives the example of the village of Sauris, in Northern Italy where people speak one language at home, another among themselves in the village and a third one while talking to outsiders and in more formal village settings. This kind of code-switching is called **Situational code-switching**. Because of this particular situation prevailing in the place every one is generally seen to switch codes many times a day. The question arises here as to why the speakers of a whole community take pains to study many languages when just one language would serve the purpose of communication. The answer they give is that they find it wrong or
improper to speak at home the language they speak to outsiders. In fact each language has a social function to fulfill and using the wrong language, as determined by social rules, fails to fulfill this social function.

In the code-switching of the kind mentioned above, it is clearly the situation that decides language. But in certain circumstances, the speaker concentrates on the less observable characteristics of the listeners and changes his language to direct the situation along his lines. Such cases where the choice of language determines the situation are called as metaphorical code-switching.

**Code-mixing**

The term code-switching denotes switching from one code to another as the situation demands. But sometimes a fluent bilingual is seen to change his code while talking to another bilingual without any change in the situation. This kind of change is generally called as code-mixing (also conversational code-switching). As Hudson views it:

The purpose of code-mixing seems to be to symbolize a somewhat ambiguous situation for which neither language on its own would be quite right. To get the right effect the speakers balance the two languages against each other as a kind of linguistic cocktail – a few words of one language, then a few words of the other, then back to the first for a few more words.
and so on. The changes generally take place more or less randomly. (53-54)

Dialect

Any realistic study of language takes into consideration its variations based on different factors. No two people speak exactly alike and nobody speaks exactly the same at all times. But minor variations in language do not interest the linguist because he finds a fundamental underlying unity in them. But when people talk different varieties of the same language distinguished by features of phonology, grammar and vocabulary we call them as dialects. When large numbers of people belonging to different social groups and living in far-flung areas speak the same language, a lot of variations are bound to occur. Dialect differences are mainly confined to pronunciation and vocabulary. For written purposes speakers of different dialects generally use some kind of a standard language, which may be considered a neutral form to all dialects.

Peter Trudgill introduces the topic of social class and language variation thus:

Speaker A
I done it yesterday.
He ain’t got it.
It was her what said it.

Speaker B
I did it yesterday.
He hasn’t got it.
It was her that said it.

Trudgill comments:
If you heard these speakers say these things you would guess that B was of higher social status than A and you would almost certainly be right. How is it that we are able to do this sort of thing? The answer lies in the existence of varieties of language, which have come to be called social class dialects. There are grammatical differences between the speech of these two speakers, which give us clues about their social backgrounds. It is also probable, although this is not indicated on the printed page, that these differences will be accompanied by phonetic and phonological differences — that is to say, there are also different social-class accents. The internal differentiation of human societies is reflected in their languages. Different social groups use different linguistic varieties, and as experienced members of a speech community we have learned to classify speakers accordingly. (22-23)

Sociolinguists use the terms *social dialects* or *sociolects* to refer to differences in speech based on social class, sex, age, and religion. Because of one or more of these factors, a speaker may be more similar in language to people from the same social grouping in a different area than to people from a different social group in the same area.
The other important factor that functions, as determinant of speech is geographical. Since the nineteenth century dialectologists have been trying to study the geographical distribution of linguistic items such as pairs of synonymous words or different pronunciations of the same word. Wardhaugh comments thus about the subject:

Regional variation in the way a language is spoken is likely to be one of the most noticeable ways in which we observe variety in language. As you travel throughout a wide geographical area in which a language is spoken, and particularly if that language has been spoken in that area for many hundreds of years, you are almost certain to notice differences in pronunciation, in the choices and forms of words, and in syntax. There may even be very distinctive local colourings in the language which you notice as you move from one location to another. Such distinctive varieties are usually called *regional dialects* of the language.

Geographical dialects are, in fact, usually difficult to delimit exactly. The boundaries are not very often sharp; instead they are separated by broad zones of intergradations. This makes their classification difficult and subject to differences in interpretation. In England each country may be said to have its own regional dialect. One observation made by dialectologists is that
regional dialect boundaries quite often coincide with geographical barriers like mountains, swamps or rivers. The more the geographical distance between two dialects the greater the linguistic dissimilarity. The dialectologists in Europe and the United States, who studied the geographical distribution of linguistic items, plotted their results on a map showing which items were found in which villages. The dialect geographer would then draw a line between the area where one item was found and areas where others were found, showing a boundary for each area called an isogloss (Greek iso- ‘same’ and gloss- ‘tongue’).

The dialectologists of the previous century, while making a study of rural dialects observed those dialects associated with groups lowest in the social hierarchy changing gradually as they moved across the countryside. They could see a whole series of different dialects gradually merge in to one another. This series is referred to as a dialect continuum - a large number of different but not usually distinct non-standard dialects connected by a chain of similarity, but with the dialects at either end of the chain being very dissimilar.

Within a geographical dialect there may be a number of other variations depending on the occupation, education, and social status of the people. This gives rise to the class dialects. In a slum area and in the best residential neighbourhood dialects show a marked variation. With reference to the Indian
society it may be said that there are different dialects based on caste. Different castes living in the same area speak different dialects in India.

Dialects are subject to change. Population mobility has brought many people into communities where they are surrounded by speakers of other dialects. Radio and television have greatly increased the hearing range. The increasing contact between speakers of different dialects inevitably affects the speech of all and diminishes differences. Many people, especially those removed very far by migration gradually lose the characteristics, which mark their origins. A dialectologist, however, can recognize their provenance because their conformity to the neighbours’ pattern is usually only partial. A good number of old habits are retained unchanged or only slightly modified especially phonologic features, which are particularly resistant to change in adults.

Kamala Das, the author under study, is fine-tuned to subtle dialect differences among people. One of the major attractions of her Malayalam works forms such fine differentiation of language as observed by her, based on factors of class, caste and region. Januamma, the servant character, around whom many of her stories revolve, is in fact, a combination of three of her servants – Chirutheyiamma, Kalyaniamma, and Paruvamma. They had been with her at various periods of her life but she remembers them in every
minute detail, especially their characteristic dialects. In the course of her talk with M.N Karassery, she reveals more about them:

There are many similarities in their speech, life-style and attitudes. Their rustic ways attracted me very much. In the midst of big cities, I sat looking at their rustic beauties. So, also there were fine differences between their dialects. When Kalyaniamma and Paruamma said 'chekkan' meaning young boy, Chirutheyiamma said 'kundan' instead. That is her Kozhikkode dialect.² (JPK 115).

The language spoken by many of her characters forms the typical dialect of the erstwhile Malabar area. The educated classes show variations from that typical dialect out of their familiarity with literary works and similar people from other areas. For example, Kamala’s dialect varies to a very great extent from that of Valli, the servant who belonged to a lower caste. Kamala’s ammamma generally does not use abbreviated forms; it is different from that of her servants.

'Madhaviamma, please recite one or two slokas”*, Kamala said.³

"Madhavi doesn't seem to remember any sloka, right now", ammamma said. (NPK 185, 186).

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* Four lined poem.
"This humble one also wants to listen to Madhavi Madam's sloham", said Valli." (NPK 186)

The woman Madhavi is addressed by Kamala as 'Madhaviamma', by ammamma as Madhavi itself and by the lower class servant as 'Madhavi amral'. The suffixes 'amma' and 'amral' indicate the respect shown to the addressee on account of her age and social distance. The word 'sloka' is altered to 'sloham' when uttered by Valli. (NPK186) Valli's language, extremely humble in tone and vocabulary, is somewhat as given here: “Why, young lady, Your Grace is asking such questions. Oh, Please, for God's sake, do not ask Valli such questions. This humble one will be kicked out by the lady of the house.” (VM123-24) When Kunjathu, the Christian from Kottappadi talks, 'Madhaviamma' becomes 'Madhiyema'. (NPK196)

Kunjathu makes use of many expressions typical of his native place. He is the only person in Kamala's works who uses the word 'shavi' (NPK56)

Dialectical variations based on caste, class and region forms a very interesting object of study in the works of Kamala Das.

* 'Shavi' is a regional version of the Malayalam word 'shavam' (dead body) used as a mild term of abuse in a very limited area of Thrissur district only.
Diglossia

The term 'diglossia' was introduced in English language literature on sociolinguistics by Charles Ferguson (1959) in order to describe the situation found in certain places like Greece, the Arabic speaking world in general, German speaking Switzerland and island of Haiti. In these places people resort to two varieties, distinct enough to be called as separate languages, one on formal and public occasions and the other in daily everyday circumstances. These two varieties are normally called 'high' and 'low' or 'standard' and 'vernacular'. Ferguson defines diglossia thus:

Diglossia is a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standard), there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, either of an earlier period or in another speech community, which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation. (325)

The diglossic situation existing in the Arab speaking community is such that the highly educated and the least educated speakers use the same
variety of language at home; but on formal occasions it is a variety much
different from the vernacular that is being used and this can be learned at
schools only. This formal variety is taught in schools just like a foreign
language. In a lecture at a university or a sermon in a mosque, invariably this
high variety known as standard Arab is being used. Since everybody uses the
low variety at home, the high variety can be learned only by going to school.
By being born in to a high-class family one does not learn the prestigious
variety; only through schooling this is learned.

Peter Trudgill defines the term diglossia thus:

Diglossia is a particular kind of language standardization where
two distinct varieties of a language exist side by side throughout
the speech community (not just in the case of a particular group
of speakers, and where each of the two varieties is assigned a
definite social function. (97-98)

Trudgill lists examples of a few language communities, which are
diglossic, together with names used:

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<th>High</th>
<th>Low</th>
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<tr>
<td>Swiss German</td>
<td>Hoch deutsch</td>
<td>Schweizer deutsch</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arab</td>
<td>Classical</td>
<td>Colloquial</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tamil</td>
<td>Literary</td>
<td>Colloquial</td>
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The diglossic situation is characterized by the specialization of function of the two varieties. This has variations depending on the community; but generally the high variety is used in university lectures, newspaper editorials, sermons, formal letters, 'high' poetry etc. The low variety is resorted to in family talks, friendly talks, radio serials, political cartoons and folk literature. In the diglossic situation it is observed that the two varieties have names and are felt to be distinct. The situations where each is to be used are socially fairly well defined — no section of the community regularly uses the high variety as the normal medium of everyday conversation. Anyone using the high variety in informal situations is normally looked at with scorn. In German Switzerland it is even considered as disloyalty if a person uses the high variety, standard German as the medium of everyday conversation because it is the medium used by speakers outside Switzerland.

S.K. Pottekkat, in his travelogue Balidweep talks about a very interesting language situation in the island of Bali, which is, situated at the southern most end of the Asian continent. All the people of the island are expected to know three languages that are different in all respects like vocabulary, grammar and sentence structures; but still considered as Bali language. The three varieties used are named as 'uccha', 'neecha' and 'shudha', more or less similar to the English terms 'high', 'low', and 'medium'. In the class differentiated society, the lower castes while talking to
the upper castes resort to the 'uccha' or 'high' variety and the other way round it is 'neecha' or 'low' variety. Between equals and at home or the market place the 'shudha' or medium variety is used. It is very fascinating to observe a conversation between two people who belong to different caste strata: one belonging to the high and the other the low. They begin the conversation in the 'medium' language and then find out each other's caste. After that the conversation becomes dramatic and each one sticks to the variety of language as fixed by the societal norms. The high variety is metaphoric and has a very rich vocabulary to suit each occasion. The lower variety contains less number of words and is more plain and lacks idiomatic expressions. In the 'high' variety 'rain' is denoted as 'sabang' and in the 'low' variety it is 'hujang'. All people except the blacksmiths are bound to follow these rules regarding the use of language based on caste. The blacksmith or 'pande' who works with fire and metal is held in awe by even the highest caste, as he is believed to possess magical powers. The blacksmith, therefore, can talk to the higher castes in the low variety and the other castes have to resort to the high variety while talking to him.

Idiolect

An individual member of a given dialect is said to have his own speech habits that distinguish him from fellow members of the group to which he belongs. The totality of the speech habits of an individual is called an idiolect.
So it can be said that a dialect is a collection of similar idiolects and that a language is a collection of dialects.

**Register**

Language is similar to other forms of social activities in that, it has to be appropriate to the speaker as well as to the social context of its use. The same speaker uses different linguistic varieties in different situations and for different purposes. Sociolinguists use the word verbal repertoire to refer to the totality of linguistic varieties used by a particular community of speakers. Social factors determine the variety to be used from this verbal repertoire. When people talk to others they work with, about their work, they generally use a particular variety of language, which they do not use at home. Such a language variety is called as register. While dialects are user oriented, registers are use oriented. Variation between speakers gives rise to dialect and variation based on occasion gives rise to registers. Trudgill defines a register as follows:

Linguistic varieties that are linked in this way to occupations, professions, or topics have been termed registers. The register of law, for example, is different from the register of medicine, which in turn is different from the language of engineering – and so on. Registers are usually characterized solely by vocabulary differences: either by the use of particular words, or
by the use of words in a particular sense. [...] Similarly professional soccer players and lay people both discuss football. The footballers however are much more likely, in Britain, to refer to the playing area as the *park*, than the laypeople, who are probably more likely to call it the *pitch*. (84-85)

**Style**

On solemn occasions and for academic lectures, we resort to the use of a more formal variety of language different from that used for public house arguments or family talk. Linguistic varieties that are linked in this way to the formality of the situation is generally termed as styles and they range between formal to informal. Styles and registers are to be seen as occurring independently. The register of football as used in a report in a high – status newspaper is of a formal style whereas the same thing in a bar comes to an informal style.

**Pidgin and Creole**

A pidgin may be defined as an amalgam of linguistic features of two or more languages and it is born out of social and economic transactions between two groups or more speaking different languages. Of the many languages that come in to contact the socially superior one undergoes a process of restriction and simplification leading to the birth of pidgin. This process of restriction and simplification is termed pidginization. A pidgin is
no one’s native language. When it becomes the native language of a speech community, it comes to be called a creole. As the pidgin gets nativized, it undergoes extension and elaboration. The greater functional and structural complexity and stability in usage distinguishes a creole from a pidgin. By the time a pidgin becomes a creole, it will have acquired all the functions and characteristics of a full natural language.

In a multilingual contact situation there are a number of language choices and the pidgin is only one such choice. Sometimes the native language of one of the groups in contact may be used, as is the case of English in Australia. Sometimes a stable multilingual situation continues to persist without the origin of a pidgin. The language which supplies the major part of the vocabulary of the pidgin is that which is spoken by the socially superior group called the superstrate language. The one or more languages that contribute less to the pidgin are spoken by the socially inferior groups and called as the substrate languages.

Pidgins grow out of economic necessity. Economic relations of trade or enforced labour make it essential for the different groups to resort to a common language. The language of the superior group is not easily available to the lower groups and so it cannot function as the contact language. Similarly, a language from the subordinate groups is also never allowed to function in this role as it has association with the inferiors. The non-
availability of the superstrate language to others may be because its speakers are very small in number compared to that of the substrate speakers. This is supposed to be the reason for the origin of Tok Pisin, a pidgin used in New Guinea, which is a linguistically complex area in the world. Yimas Pidgin, and Police Motu are two other pidgins spoken in New Guinea where, about a thousand languages are spoken. Another reason is that the superstrate speakers do not want others to learn their language; they treat it as a badge of their distinctive cultural identity and hide it from the outsiders in front of whom they speak a different variety specialized for use in contact situations with speakers of other languages.

Whatever the reasons may be, the pidgin that arises in a restricted social context has a much-reduced range of linguistic functions to perform, in comparison with native languages. Generally, a pidgin functions to make people perform certain functions within a plantation or trading context. It is not used for other functions like building social relationships or expressing abstract ideas or for creating literary works. A pidgin is said to have creolized only when it is able to perform all such linguistic functions. A pidgin may develop and become structurally elaborated but still it cannot be called as a creole as long as its social role has expanded from being a mere contact language in to one with higher functions. Mühlhäusler presents the life history
of a pidgin thus: unstable jargon—stable pidgin—expanded pidgin—creole.\textsuperscript{5}
(qtd. in William A. Foley 167)

**Linguistic variation and Social correlation**

Sociolinguistics being the study of the social uses of language is multidimensional in orientation. Generally speaking there is a wide range of functions to which language can be put, the primary one being ‘referential’ i.e. to exchange facts and opinions. Another one is the ‘emotive’ or ‘expressive’ function of language i.e. use of language to give an outlet to sudden emotions (like the words ‘ouch’, ‘wow’, ‘my’, ‘what a pity!’ etc). Yet another function of language is to establish rapport or signal friendship between people, otherwise called as phatic communion. But ordinarily it goes unnoticed by many that even a brief conversation provides much scope for a serious linguistic study. People reveal a lot about themselves, their background, and their characters while they are engaged in verbal exchange. People gather a lot of information about other people engaged in conversation; this becomes all the more interesting when they are strangers. In such a case the hearer is not constrained by any pre-suppositions; but after listening to a few sentences he gains a lot of information about the stranger. J. K. Chambers classifies the kinds of inferences in to five categories as 1) personal, 2) stylistic, 3) social 4) socio-cultural and 5) sociological
Personal characteristics

The voice of a person can be high or low-pitched, nasal or open, monotonal or moving up and down along the scale. So also observations like fluent or hesitant speech, articulate or vague speech lead the listener to derive impressions of the other person's character. Similarly observation of the vocabulary can also be an interesting area of study. But observations at this personal level have not led to much serious linguistic study. How personal speech characteristics differ from society to society or how these characteristics are used by listeners to frame judgments about speakers could be taken up more seriously under sociolinguistic research.

Linguistic styles

The degree of familiarity between the participants in a conversation, their relative ages and ranks, the function of their conversation and similar matters emerge out of the conversation and it is speech style that determines such things. The range of possibilities is wide. The casualness between intimate friends who share a lot of experiences and the formality of unequal participants who are meeting for the first time – with numerous intervening levels. The most important thing to be noticed is that stylistic differences have a simple social correlate: formality increases in direct proportion to the number of social differences between the participants.
Social characteristics

Chambers comments thus about the social characteristics of human speech:

Whenever we speak we reveal not only some personality traits and certain sensitivity to the contextual style, but also a whole configuration of characteristics that we by and large share with everyone who resembles us socially. Usually without much conscious effort on our part, we embody in our speech, as in our dress, manners, and material possessions the hallmarks of our social background. Our speech, from this perspective, is emblematic in the same sense as is the car we drive or the way we dress for work but, obviously, our speech is much less manipulable, much harder to control consciously, and for that reason much more revealing. Generally people tend to associate with others who share with them certain social characteristics. Class, sex and age are some of the social factors that exercise much influence on human behaviour and language. These primary determinants of social roles are quite complex and carry within them a host of social factors.
Socio-cultural factors

Certain topics that are discussed by people and the ways in which they discuss them are quite often culturally determined. This applies most to phatic communion i.e. different kinds of speech events used for greeting people at various occasions. The term ‘namasthe’, said with the palms together for greeting people is purely Indian in origin and cannot be substituted with any term from any other language. Similarly, the conversation-ender, “Have a nice day” has its origins in the United States and started spreading outwards in the 1970s. Now it is used outside the United States in many parts, but it is still a stylish Americanism. In the case of culture-laden interactions, the non-verbal component is equally or more important than the verbal. There are places where the shopkeepers sell their wares in silence and place their change on the counter, and thus wind up the transaction. Similarly, words gain different implications from culture to culture; subtle differences bound in discourse rules and all these reflect the sociocultural climate of the place where the interaction takes place.

Sociological factors

Language has much to do with the social structure also; this kind of sociological function is evident in the conventionalized use of address forms and pronoun varieties. Distinctions between ‘nii’ and ‘ningal’ or ‘taan’ as used in Kerala; ‘esi’ or ‘esis’ in Greece or ‘tu’ or ‘vous’ in France have no
relevance linguistically but sociologically they are extremely relevant because such distinctions mark the social ranks of the participants.

Of the different kinds of information that can be inferred from the speech of people, the social aspects have gained the highest degree of attention from sociolinguists. Variability of language and its study based on individual speakers have gradually given way to variability studies on large scale and linguists like Labov have come up with the finding that the occurrence of variability in a speech community is systematic, and patterned and it depends on certain factors like social class, caste, ethnic group, sex, nation, geography etc.

Language and social class

All societies are marked by division of people in to various classes, based on their wealth, privilege, and opportunities. It is a commonly observed fact that people who share similarity in such factors, come together and knowingly or unknowingly they distance themselves from other groups. Quite often such differentiations go unnoticed because class-consciousness turns out to be harmless and tolerable quite often. So also in most societies class divisions are arbitrary in the sense that an ambitious man can break class barriers and do away with any stigma attached to him by way of being a member of any particular class. One of the markers of stratification is ‘class’ as far as any society is concerned.
The topic of class divisions and its consequences has been taken up and studied elaborately by economists, sociologists, and psychologists. Class differentiation and its linguistic consequences is only one dimension of the topic. Social stratification - the hierarchical ordering of groups within a society - is what gives rise linguistically to social class dialects. The notion of 'social class' is a highly controversial one. Since there is no uniformity regarding its nature or existence in different places sociological theorists approach the topic from different angles, but the fact remains that a social class is an “aggregate of individuals with similar social and /or economic characteristics”(Trudgill23-24).

According to Chambers, the study of the linguistic consequences of social class is important because:

In the industrialized nations, social class is the most linguistically marked aspect of our social being. Our closest ties are more local, in what are called networks. The extent to which we participate in the activities of our families, neighbourhoods, clubs and other local entities - or distance ourselves from them - also has linguistic consequences. (41)

In industrialized nations, the major social division is between people who earn their living by working with their hands and those who do the same by pencil work or intellectual work. Accidentally, the manual workers have
come to be called as "working class" and the non-manual workers as "middle class". Another class consisting of people with inherited wealth and privilege - called as the upper class exists in some nations of the world; but they are limited in number and dwindling down in the present age and not significant enough to be considered from a linguistic point of view in most countries.

Most sociolinguists refer to India as an example of a highly stratified caste society. Even in the present day, at least in certain parts of India language contributes to the continuing significance of caste in India. Madhavikkutty's childhood days represent such a period in the history of India when people were segregated into various castes and caste formed the basis of all social activities and divisions. Caste and its linguistic relevance has been dealt with in Chapter IV.

India is basically a caste based society and many sociolinguistics have taken interest in studying the language scenario in India based on this factor. The argument of most sociolinguists, of late, is that class systems and caste systems are not separate types of social organizations; the two systems appear to be poles on a continuum. Chambers who is in favour of viewing the two as very similar systems presents the situation thus:

They share the essential characteristics of an unequal distribution of material and personal goods. They differ in that in a class system people who by birth and circumstance start out
as members of one rank can ascend (or descend) to another rank. In other words the essential difference is mobility. A caste system is a class system with no social or occupational mobility.

Language and gender

In most societies there are a large number of differences between the speech of men and women. At least in certain respects, the linguistic forms used by men and women differ in all speech communities that have been studied. In some cases the differences are negligible and not generally noticed. But in some societies the differences reach such dimensions that men and women appear to talk different languages altogether. Language differences occurring on account of class, ethnic group etc. can be explained in terms of density of communication. In the case if regional varieties of language, geographical barriers such as mountains, and rivers are relevant i.e. speakers to the south and north of a river pronounce words differently. So also, greater the geographical distance between the two dialects, the more dissimilar they are linguistically. Similarly, social barriers and social distance seem to be relevant in the explanation of social varieties of language. Social barriers like class, age, race, and religion can, in fact, halt the diffusion of a linguistic feature through a society. So also, a linguistic innovation that begins amongst the highest social group will not easily affect the lowest social group.
But it is not possible to explain gender-based language differences in terms of social distance because in most societies men and women communicate freely with one another. Different theories have been attributed to sex-based language differences. The language of the Carib-Indians shows clear demarcation between male and female varieties. The reason is attributed to the mixing of two languages as the Caribs came to occupy the islands. They exterminated the existing Arawak tribe except the women whom they married in order to populate the country. Probably, the women continued to speak the Arawak language with modifications coming in due to the influence of the Carib language.

Another theory, a plausible explanation, is provided by the linguist Otto Jesperson who is of the view that language differentiation may be the result of the phenomenon of taboo. In addition to the physical environment and social structure, the values of a society can have great influence on its language. This happens mainly through the phenomenon known as taboo. Trudgill defines taboo thus:

Taboo can be characterized as being concerned with behaviour which is believed to be supernaturally forbidden, or regarded as immoral or improper; it deals with behaviour which is prohibited or inhibited in an apparently irrational manner. In language, taboo is associated with things, which are not said,
and in particular with words and expressions which are *not* used. In practice, of course, this simply means that there are inhibitions about the normal use of items of this kind - if they were not said at all they could hardly remain in the language. (17)

In different parts of the world taboo words are different and approach to same also varies. This is one area where male and female language show marked deviation. Many societies expect a higher level of adherence to social norms - better behaviour and better language - from women than they do from men. The social pressures on women arising by way of the gender discrimination is quite high because they are expected to acquire the prestige variety or more socially acceptable language.

Wardhaugh tries to give different types of explanations for the gender differences that are observed in language behaviour. One explanation is that language may be sexist. Another reason, according to him, is that men and women are biologically different and this difference has serious consequences as far as language is concerned. Women are pre-disposed psychologically to be involved with one another and more cooperative and non-competitive. But men are innately pre-disposed to independence and vertical rather than horizontal relationships, i.e. to power rather than to solidarity.
Yet another explanation is that social organization is best perceived as some kind of hierarchical set of power relationships. This is a social fact by which men have the upper hand. Difference in social language behaviour reflects the social dominance of men. They try to take control while talking to women and also while talking to each other. Wardhaugh is of the opinion that language behaviour is largely learned behaviour. Men learn to be men and women learn to be women linguistically speaking.

The head voices of the Peking opera sound very strange to an untrained ear and like-wise the outbursts of high-pitched wailing of professional mourners in Greece also produces wonder in the outsiders. There are studies by Japanese researchers to the effect that Japanese women speak Japanese language, and English language using different pitch while men speak both languages with the same pitch. There may be individual speakers who deviate from this norm but the majority adheres to it. (Coulmas37). Pitch has been thought to be very much a natural feature but studies prove that even this is a cultural construct to a very large extent. Other than pitch there are so many features of speech behaviour that vary with the sex of the speaker.

Coulmas distinguishes between the words 'sex' and 'gender' in a subtle manner thus, "sex is nature, gender is culture"(38). Research has authentically established that gender is a factor of linguistic variation. The case of the participle suffix in words like walking, running, and jumping has
been taken up by many researchers to establish how phonological variables in
different realizations mark regional or social dialects. Surveys have revealed
that some pronounce the words as [m] and some as [n]. The researchers
realized that they should be guided by the relative frequency of the variables
in the speech of the selected people rather than the presence or absence of it.
In fact, all speakers of all social groups control and use both social forms-in
[m] and –ing [n]; but the frequencies of their choice differ. What is relevant
and valuable is the observation that these frequencies are not random;
preferences by various groups of speakers exhibit systematic pattern, which
can be linked to extra-linguistic factors. Surveys have shown that the
proportion of the reduced form [m] is highest in the lowest social group and
lowest in the highest social group. Thus, it follows that the [n] form, which
is used more by the higher social groups, is considered more prestigious.
Many who have done research in this area for quite long have come up with
another interesting observation as a result of their breaking down the data
along gender lines. The fact is that women tend to use the prestigious varieties
more frequently than men. This is common to all social strata; but the
differential between men and women is more conspicuous in the lower social
groups. Women of the higher social groups are oriented more towards the
prestige variety The reason may be that women of the higher social groups are
more concerned about their social position or probably, they want to sound
less local and gain an image as of not being inferior to men. As Coulmas comments upon it:

It is also important to remember that the preferred use of the standard or prestige variants by women is a tendency typical of groups of speakers, not individuals. Women and men do not speak as women and men only but as teachers and students, friends and strangers, clerks and customers, employers and employees, as members of an ethnic group, religious community and so on, and in many other more individualized capacities. (41)

Further studies have also shown that the social networks in which men and women move about do have a bearing upon the speech variants they use. This is more applicable to women who tend to interact more than men in dense, multiplex networks. But studies also point to the fact that speaker-sex cannot be taken as a primary independent variable and that additional variables like employment status, education, having children or not do have a deep impact on women's choice of speech variants. In every aspect like words used by men and women, the ways they address each other and respond to each other the sex/gender difference becomes of utmost importance.
Language and age

Age has been identified as another important factor in linguistic choice. Language is a tradition; otherwise we would not understand one another. According to Coulmas:

It must be handed down from one generation to the next in a way that allows members of co-existing generations to communicate. But it is not handed down unaltered. For each generation recreates the language of its predecessors (52).

As one generation hands down its language to the next, a lot of changes takes place in it. Probably the reason is that communication needs change and this forces the users to bring about changes in the language to suit the world of their experience. Human life span is divisible in to four age cohorts, infancy, adolescence, adulthood and old age. They differ from each other in various ways, of which language use is one important one.

Age differentiation of speech starts at the very beginning. Babies cannot talk like grown-ups. Language socialization takes years. Language socialization is the process by which the young one learns to talk like adults. Social interaction as well as deliberate instruction by others is equally important in the socialization of a child. Coulmas uses the word ‘Parentese’ to refer to the short, simple sentences used by parents, delivered slowly and articulated carefully while talking to young children. In fact, the parents
adjust their speech when they talk with children; but the way they speak to children is a product of their own individual stylistic choice and of the stereotype current in that particular society. Parentese is an interesting topic from a sociolinguistic point of view because it is a stylistic register that the adult develops for the purpose of social interaction with the young ones.

Madhavikkutty mentions many instances when she used to interact with her little sons using a sort of 'parentese'. It was her habit to talk to the children remaining hidden underneath the cot without revealing her identity. Quite often she talked as though she was 'Lord Krishna' having come to meet the small ones. They would also talk back as they were happy to be in the presence of Krishna. This technique, she claims, very much pleased the children and taught them to be imaginative although initially it all took place unknowingly.

The language of adolescents is perhaps the most thoroughly investigated one of the different age-related ones. Adolescents are competent speakers of their language, and they have complete control over it. They inherit the language from the adults; but they bring about modifications over it to make it different from adult language. Coulmas summarises the features and functions that characterize adult speech in the following words:

Use of sub-standard, dialectal, and vernacular forms, slang and innovative, often short lived expressions serve three main
functions: 1) to appropriate the language for the speakers' own purposes; 2) to manifest group membership and construct a distinct identity; and 3) to indicate the speakers' willingness to resist the pressure to conform to societal norms (60).

It is seen that the young and middle-aged adults form the dominant age-cohort in most societies and their behaviour and speech forms the norm of the society.

When adults try to garnish their speech with up-to-the minute expressions, it comes to be noticed immediately because thereby they are breaking the norm and trying to belong to the adolescent sub culture. It is adults who command maximum societal strength and at the same time undergo maximum pressure to conform to existing norms. The use of stigmatized varieties is also the minimum during adulthood.

In old age or the last phase of life, the pressures to conform to societal norms are minimum. In fact, the characteristics of elderly speech are much disregarded by society because it is not generally regarded as a matter of choice but as a natural concomittant of ageing accompanied by progressive decline of competence. The communication patterns that result from ageing are not usually included as topics coming under sociolinguistics. People of other age groups quite often adopt a sort of patronizing attitude and modified style of talk while communicating with the elderly. Many elderly people find
it distressing to be addressed in this manner and this, in fact opens up another area of research in sociolinguistics.

Language and ethnicity

Language, quite often, becomes a defining characteristic of ethnic-group membership. In some cases the separate identity of ethnic groups is projected not by different languages, but by different varieties of the same language. As Trudgill comments:

It remains true, however, that in many cases language may be an important or even essential concomitant of ethnic group membership. This is a social fact, though, and it is important to be clear about what sort of processes may be involved. (41)

Language and context

Language varies not only according to the above-mentioned social characteristics of speakers but also along with the social context in which they are placed. The same speaker uses different linguistic varieties in different situations and for different purposes. The totality of the linguistic varieties used in this way constitutes that person's verbal repertoire. Every person has a verbal repertoire, which is part of the repertoire of the community to which he belongs. An individual chooses words from the repertoire depending on the occasion. Speech made use of in the office is very much different from the
one used among intimate relations at home. Similarly, academic lectures and ceremonial occasions demand more serious and formal language compared to friendly chitchat or talk over family lunch. Language also varies according to whether it is written or spoken. Other conditions being equal, written language is ordinarily more formal than spoken. Literary variety of language is much different from that made use of in personal correspondences.

Another very important aspect regarding the use of language is determined by the relationships between the persons involved in the conversation and their relative statuses. Speech between individuals of unequal rank - due to varying status in the office, or by belonging to different class or age group - is likely to be much more formal and less relaxed than between equals. In many cultures there are different forms of address stipulated to be followed by people of unequal statuses or relationships. Different degrees of politeness or intimacy are signaled linguistically. Plenty of examples are available in Madhavikkutty's memory works showing how unequal relationships of her childhood days as they existed in the society of her days had much linguistic relevance. The diglossic situation observed in many countries is a result of the long-term social inequality practiced there.

Language and social interaction

It has been observed quite often that people switch over from one language to another or from one dialect to another easily. Such choices are in
fact imbued with social meaning. Whether it is a language or a dialect, the social meanings associated with its selection are similar and so linguists have conveniently chosen the word ‘code’ to indicate any such choice. A code can be a language or a variety of it. When such code switching is carried out, the speakers are generally aware of the two distinct varieties, although they may not be conscious of every switch they make. Code switching occurs spontaneously and not without prior preparation. Coulmas presents the following situation as a typical example of code switching: A Sicilian fishmonger addresses a customer in the local dialect. He switches to Italian in answering the customer’s question, but then switches back to the dialect while the customer continues speaking Italian. This is a typical example of situational code switching. Ideal code switchers speak at least two languages, which are habitually spoken in their community. They can speak both languages sufficiently well, although they may not be equally proficient in both. A wine connoisseur who remarks in mock consternation, ‘He drank this wine from a beer glass quelle horreur!’ can not be considered as a case of regular situational code-switching; he uses it for a metaphorical purpose only, sometimes it is referred to as ‘affective switching’. A flight attendant en route from London to Hongkong who makes announcements alternatively in English and Chinese is not doing the switching spontaneously; on the other hand it is an example of rehearsed switching.
On the whole it can be said that it is not easy to say why people code switch. Researchers say that individual speakers have their own reasons for choosing one language at one time and another language at another time.

There are a large number of terms associated with sociolinguistic studies; but only the most basic and essential to the studies have been mentioned in this context.
Notes


2. The above refers to the citation of a book in Malayalam. The author is not specified. The book is presumably about the intersection of language and identity in Creole-speaking communities.

3. This is a quote from the text, possibly a caption or a note.

4. Another quote, this time in English, translated into Malayalam. The context is unclear but it seems to discuss the relationship between language and identity.

(Translation of Malayalam quotes provided for context and comprehension.)
Works cited


