




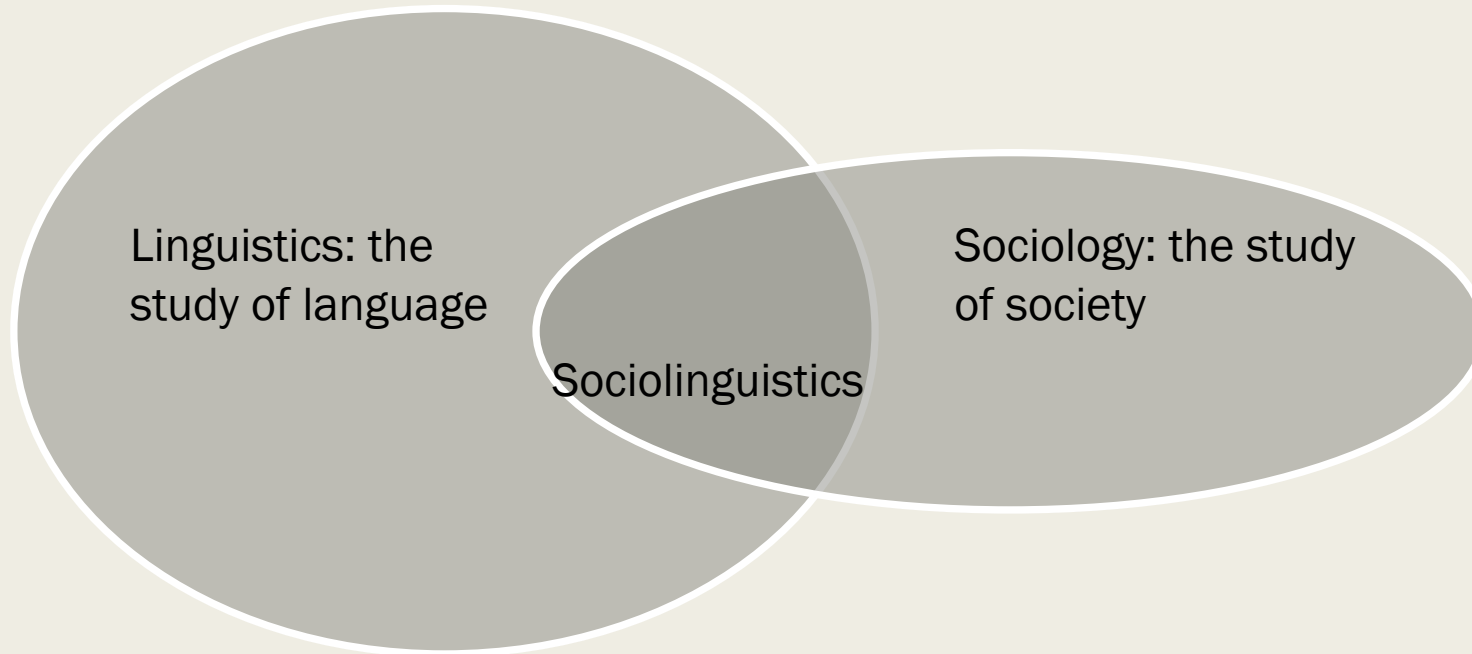
SOCIOLINGUISTICS

Online Lecture
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Sociolinguistics= The sociology of language= The intersection of linguistics and sociology

Sociolinguistics examines all aspects of the relationship between language and society.



Society

What is it?

A **society** consists of *people who interact and share a common culture.*

(Stolley 2005)

Culture

Culture is made up of *all of the ideas, beliefs, behaviors, and products common to, and defining, a group's way of life*. Culture encompasses everything humans create and have as they interact together.

Two types of culture:

- **Material culture** includes *all the tangible products created by human interaction*. Any physical objects created by humans are part of the material culture. This includes clothing, books, art, buildings, computer software, inventions, food, vehicles, tools, and so on.
- **Nonmaterial culture** consists of *the intangible creations of human interaction*. These exist as our ideas, languages, values, beliefs, behaviors, and social institutions.

(Stolley 2005)

Social Structure

Society includes our **social institutions**, *the major social organizations formed to meet our human needs.*

The family, medical system, military, religious system, political system, economy, and educational system are all examples of social institutions.

All of these social institutions are interrelated.

Together, they comprise a society's **social structure**, *the way a society is organized around the regulated ways people interrelate and organize social life.*

(Stolley 2005)

Language

What is it?

- Language, as defined by Chomsky, is a set of specific universal principles or intrinsic properties of the human mind and part of our species' genetic endowment.
- These principles are realized in reality in a particular variety of language, a dialect of a language.
- The term *dialect* comes from Greek, ***dialektos***, meaning 'discourse, way of speaking'.

What are you doing when you are doing Sociolinguistics?

Sociolinguistics is concerned with

- descriptions of dialects,
- investigations of language variation and change,
- analyses of the roles that language or particular linguistic features play in the construction of individual or group identities.

Language and varieties of language

We must be careful not to overrate the uniformity of existing languages; it is far enough from being absolute. In a true and defensible sense, every individual speaks a language different from every other.

Whitney (1875)

Language and dialects

Language = set of mutual intelligible dialects

The dialects of a single language can be defined as mutually intelligible forms of a language that differ in systematic ways from each other.

It is, however, not always easy to determine whether the systematic differences between the two speech communities reflect two dialects or two different languages.

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.

Dialect continuum

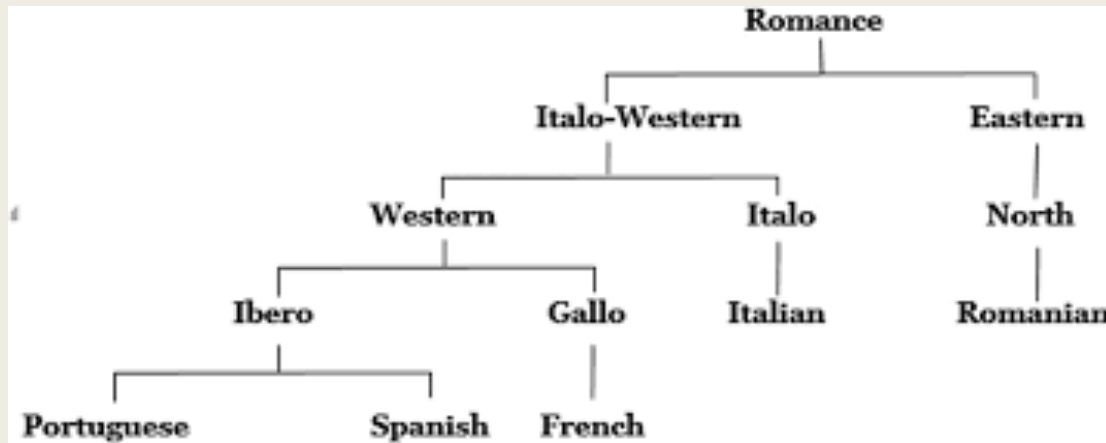
- For simplicity, a dialect can be considered as a language variety associated with a particular place, or a geographical dialect.
- A dialect continuum is a chain of dialects with the following property:

Speakers of dialects D1 and D2 understand each other extremely well; speakers of dialects D1 and D3 understand each other rather less well,...; but speakers of D1 and D8 do not understand each other.

This is what actually happens in Europe: speakers of adjacent villages from the Atlantic coast of France through Italy, Spain, and Portugal can understand each other, whereas speakers of standard French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese cannot.

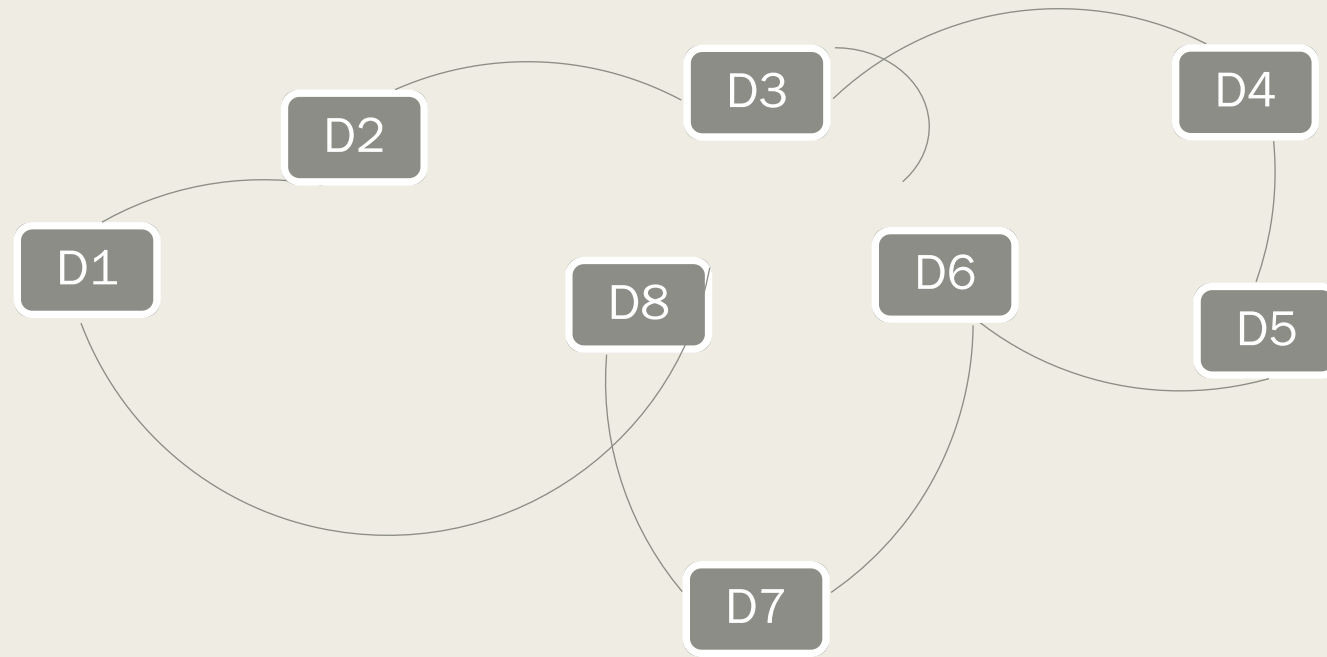
Dialect continuum

Mutual intelligibility (mutual understanding verbally)



Observe, for instance, the similarities of second person pronouns in Catalan (a language spoken in northeastern Spain): tu vostè and French: tu vous

Dialect continuum



Regional dialects

Dialectal diversity develops when people are separated from each other geographically and socially.

Changes in the language spoken in one area or group do not necessarily spread to another.

Within a single group of speakers, the changes are spread among the group.

When some communication barrier separates groups of speakers, be it a physical barrier such as an ocean or a mountain range, or social barriers of a political, racial, class, or religious kind, linguistic changes cannot be spread, which results in dialectal differences.

A change in one region, not spread to other regions of the language community gives rise to dialect differences.

Accents

- Regional phonological or phonetic distinctions are known as different accents. Take, for instance, the accent of a Vietnamese speaker in Hue differs from that of a speaker in Hanoi.
- As for American English, the accent of a Bostonian (a person born and raised in Boston) differs from the Southern accent, the Brooklyn (New York) accent, and so on.
- Therefore, accent refers to the characteristics of speech that convey information about the speaker's dialect

Accents

- The term accent is also used to describe the speech of a non-native speaker. For example, a Korean person speaking English as a foreign language can be said to speak English with a Korean accent.

Dialects = Idiolects

All speakers of Vietnamese (English) can talk to each other and understand each other.

And yet, they do not speak exactly alike.

Differences arise from factors/variables such as age, gender, state of health, personality, emotional state, and personal idiosyncrasies.

The term used to refer to unique characteristics of the language of an individual speaker is idiolect.

Suppose Vietnamese is spoken by (how many speakers?) 90 milion speakers (!), then we can say that there are 90 milion idiolects of Vietnamese.

Dialects of American English

- Regional dialects inform us of how language changes. For instance, the origins of many regional dialects of American can be traced back to the people who first settled North America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.
- The early settlers came from different parts of England, speaking different dialects. Therefore regional dialect differences existed in the first colonies.
- In addition to English settlers, other waves of immigration brought speakers of other dialects and other languages to different regions. For instance, the Germans in the last half of the eighteenth century settled in southeastern part of Philadelphia, the Welsh in the west of Philadelphia, the Scotch-Irish in the Midlands area.

Dialects of English: Phonological differences

- How regional dialects developed may be illustrated by changes in the pronunciation of words with an /r/.
- Note that /r/ occurs in a number linguistic environments. In the following environments, it is never or very rarely dropped.
 1. Word initial: reed, raw...
 2. Between two vowels: arrow, borrow...
 3. In consonant clusters before a vowel: bread, bring...

Dialects of English: Phonological differences

Say this and I can tell where you are from: *Park a car at Harvard Yard!*

The /r/ dropping occurs in the following environments:

1. After a vowel: guard, board...
 2. Word final: floor, rider...
- If we look at English today, there are three possibilities for accent in relation to /r/:
 - Retain /r/
 - Variably retain and drop /r/
 - Categorically drop /r/

Categorically retain /r/	Variably retain and drop /r/	Categorically drop /r/
General American class of accents: midland, north central, middle Atlantic...	Local accents in the west of England	Received Pronunciation (RP) in England and Wales
General Canadian	A few accent local accents in the north of England	Local accents of the east and north of England
Scottish accents	New York city	Most accents of Wales and New Zealand
Irish accents	‘Borderline’ areas in US: South, eastern, New England, black American vernacular	Australia
Some West Indian, e.g. Barbados		South Africa Some parts of eastern New England Southern speech area in US Some West Indian. E.g. Trinidad

Lexical differences

Regional dialects also differ in the words people use for the same object.

Tell me what it is and let me guess where are you from.

North American: pants

England: trousers

In England, people take a **lift** to the **first floor**.

In America, they take an **elevator** to the **second floor**.

In England, you have to pay to go to **public** school (because it is private).

To save time, you take a **freeway** in Los Angeles, a **thruway** in New York, a **parkway** in New Jersey, a **motorway** in England, an **expressway** or **turnpike** in other dialect areas.

All the words above refers to a highway designed for fast traffic, with controlled entrance and exit, a dividing strip between the traffic in opposite directions, and typically two or more lanes in each direction.



Syntactic differences

Syntactic differences also distinguish dialects.

- In most American dialects, sentences can be conjoined as follows:

John will go and Mary will go => John and Mary will go.

In the Ozark dialect (spoken mostly in the states of Missouri, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Illinois), the conjunction can be as follows:

John will go and Mary.

Some American dialects, people say ‘Have them come early!’ while others would say ‘Have them to come early!’

Standardization

- The so-called dialect continuum, mentioned previously, indicates that it is wrong to think of languages as discrete entities, namely to take ‘the English language’, ‘the German language’... as entities with clear boundaries, homogeneity, or invariant rules, either in time or space.
- A language manifests itself as being variational and heterogeneous; however, for non-linguistic reasons, a process is always at work that aims at making a language uniform. This process gives rise to the evolution of standard languages.

Standardization

■ Consider the following sentences.

1. He don't never wear shoes.

2. He never wears shoes.

(2) is considered as 'correct' English and (1) as bad English.

Why so? (1) is taken as non-standard English and (2) as standard English. Why?

Standardization and codification

- Standardization is a complex of belief and behaviour toward language with evolves historically.
- It is a social behavior towards language, deeply integrated into such historical factors as the development of literacy, the growth of nationalism, and the evolution of centralizing states.
- A standard language is a social institution and part of the abstract, unifying identity of a large and internally differentiated society.
- **Codification** is an attempt to create a uniform norm of usage, to identify one variety as 'really' the language.

Code-switching

- Code-switching is what happens when a speaker alternates between two or more languages, or language varieties, in the context of a single conversation or situation.

(English is in *italic*; Tagalog is in **boldface**.)

Mother: *Francis, why don't you play the piano for your godmother?* Francis: *Mommy, I don't want to. It's so **hirap eh**.* ([in Tagalog] "Because it's so difficult.")

Diglossia

Diglossia refers to the coexistence of two varieties of the same language throughout a speech community.

Very often, one form is the literary or prestige dialect, and the other is a common dialect spoken by most of the population.

This is what happens in many speech communities the world over. For instance, in Greece, Katharevusa, heavily influenced by Classical Greek, is the prestige dialect and Demotic is the popular spoken language.

Diglossia

Sociolinguists may also use the term diglossia to denote bilingualism, the speaking of two or more languages by the members of the same community, as, for example, in New York where many members of the Hispanic community speak both Spanish and English, switching from one to the other according to the social situation or the needs of the moment.

Lingua Francas

When a desire for social and commercial communication emerges among people speaking divergent languages in an area, one language is often used by common agreement. Such a language is called a **lingua franca**. More often, a lingua franca serves as a 'trade language'.

Hindi and Urdu are the lingua francas of Indian and Pakistan.

In China, a standard language, called Putonghua, with the pronunciation of Beijing dialect, the grammar of Northern Chinese, and the vocabulary of modern colloquial Chinese is taken as a lingua franca for the country.

Pidgins and Creoles

- A pidgin language is a grammatically simplified means of communication that develops between two or more groups of people that do not have a language in common: typically, its vocabulary and grammar are limited and often drawn from several languages. It is most commonly employed in situations such as trade or where both groups speak languages different from the language of the country in which they reside (but where there is no common language between the groups). Linguists do not typically consider pidgins as full or complete languages.

A creole language or creole is a stable natural language that develops from the simplifying and mixing of different languages into a new one within a fairly brief period of time: often, a pidgin evolved into a full-fledged language.

Styles, Slang, and Jargon

- Styles

Most speakers of a language know many dialects, and choose to use one instead of the others. For instance, they use one ‘dialect’ to talk with friends, and another for business, and so on. These ‘situation dialects’ are called styles.

- Slang

a type of language that consists of words and phrases that are regarded as very informal, are more common in speech than writing, and are typically restricted to a particular context or group of people. For instance, *grass* is slang for *marijuana*.

- *Jargon*

special words or expressions that are used by a particular profession or group and are difficult for others to understand: *legal jargon*.

Register

- *Register* is another complicating factor in any study of language varieties. Registers are sets of language items associated with discrete occupational or social groups. Surgeons, airline pilots, bank managers, sales clerks, jazz fans, and pimps employ different registers.

Taboo

- Certain words in all societies are considered **taboo** – they are not to be used or at least, not in ‘polite company’. The word **taboo** was borrowed from Tongan, a polynesian language. In this language, **taboo** refers to acts that are forbidden or to be avoided.
- What acts or words are forbidden reflect the particular customs and views of the society.

Euphemism

The existence of taboo words or taboo ideas leads to the creation of euphemisms. A euphemism is a word or phrase that replaces a taboo word or serves to avoid frightening or unpleasant subjects.

For instance, since death is feared in many societies, there are many euphemisms related to this subject, so instead of saying **die**, people say **pass on** or **pass away**.

Language and sexism

Sexism refers to prejudice, stereotyping, or discrimination, typically against women, on the basis of sex: *sexism in language is an offensive reminder of the way the culture sees women.*

Language reflects sexism in society by the way we interpret neutral terms (non-gender-specific terms). Most people, on hearing *My cousin is a professor* (or a doctor, a general, a steel worker...) , assume the cousin is a man. This assumption is not language related, but is triggered by the fact that women have not been prominent in these positions.

If they hear someone say *My cousin is a nurse* (an elementary school teacher, a typist...), they would conclude that the cousin is a women.

Summary

Every person has an individual way of speaking, called an **idiolect**.

The language used by a group of speakers showing systematic differences is called a **dialect**. Dialects include **social** and **regional dialects**.

Dialect differences include phonological or pronunciation differences (often called **accents**), vocabulary, and syntactic differences.

In areas where many languages are spoken, one language may become a **lingua franca** to facilitate communication among the people.

In other cases where traders or missionaries or travellers need to communicate with people who speak a different language unknown to them, a **pidgin** may develop.

When a pidgin is widely used and learned by children as their first language, it becomes a **creole**.

- Besides regional and social dialects, speakers may use different **styles, registers**, depending on contexts.
- Slang is not used in formal situation and writing, but widely used in speech.
- Taboo words and acts give rise to **euphemisms**, which are words and phrases that replace the expressions to be avoided.

Tentative assignments (subject to change)

- Investigate the differences between the Korean spoken in North Korea (Democratic People's Republic Korea) and the Korean spoken in South Korea (Republic of Korea)
- Examine the differences between the English spoken in Boston and the English spoken in the southern area of the United States.
- Examine the differences between the Vietnamese spoken in Hanoi and its neighboring areas and the Vietnamese spoken in the Mekong delta.