

CHAPTER 10 (An Introduction to Sociolinguistics by Janet Holmes)

Style and Register

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Example 1

(Book, example 1, P: 235)

Three **different** requests for information:

1- From a friend:

Where were you last night? I rang to see if you wanted to come to the movies.

2- In court from a lawyer:

Could you tell the court where you were on the night of Friday the seventeenth of March?

3- From a teacher to his pupil in school on the day after Halloween:

I know some of you went “trick-or-treating” last night and so I thought we might talk a bit today about how you got on. Did you go out last night Jimmy?

Style

- Speakers can convey the same information differently. They change the style of their speech according to the :
 - 1- Addressee
 - 2- Context
- **Style:** The range of variation within the speech of an individual speaker.
 - **i.e.** A variation of language from formal to informal.
- People's styles of speech [stylistic features] reflect **NOT ONLY** aspects of their **identity** such as their ethnicity, age, gender, and social background, but also **indicate** the contexts in which language is being used.

Example 2

(Book, example 2, P: 236)

(a) Excuse me. Could I have a look at your photos too, Mrs. Hall?

(b) C'mon Tony, gizzalook, gizzalook.

Addressee as an Influence on Style

- The **better** you **know** someone, the **more casual** and **relaxed** the speech style you will use with them.
- People use **more standard forms** to the people they do **not know well** and **more vernacular forms** to their friends.
 - A study in Northern Ireland showed that people used more standard English with an English stranger visiting their village than they did talking to a fellow villager.
- When the **addressee** is the **influence**, a speaker will choose the appropriate style based on:
 - 1- **Relationship** between the speaker and addressee
 - 2- **How well** the speaker **knows** the addressee
 - 3- **How close** the speaker feels to the addressee (**solidarity** and **social distance**)
 - 4- **Age** of the addressee
 - 5- **Social background** of the addressee

Examples 3

(Book, example 3, P: 237)

Mrs. N: Oooh, he's walking already.

Mother: Oh, yes, he's such a clever little fellow aren't you?

Mrs. N: Hullo coogieboo, Eeeee.... Loo, diddle diddle dur, Ohh, eechy, weechy poo poo. Ohh eechy, peachy poo poo. There look at him laughing. Oh he's a chirpy little fellow. **Yees.**
Whoooo's a chirpy little fellow eh? Yes. **Ooooh**, can he talk? Can he talk **eh eh?**

Example 4

(Book, example 4, P: 237)

1- Dear Paul,

Thanks for your last letter and the subsequent postcards from exotic resorts. We were all green with envy over your trip to Rio with all expenses paid! How do you get to be so lucky! Thanks also for the great T-shirt you sent for Rob's birthday. He has vowed to write to you in order to express his gratitude personally – but don't hold your breath! He is particularly embroiled in some new complex computer game at present which is absorbing every spare moment.

2- Dear Michael,

Thank you very much for the letter you sent me. It was beautifully written and I enjoyed reading it. I liked the postcards you sent me from your holidays too. What a lovely time you had swimming and surfing. I wished I was there too. Robbie liked the T-shirt you chose for him very much. He has been wearing it a lot. He has promised to write to you soon to say thank you but he is very busy playing with his computer at the moment. So you may have to wait a little while for his letter. I hope mine will do instead for now.

Example 5

(Book, example 5, P: 237)

It's time for **our** [i.e. your] lunch now isn't it Mary. **We** [i.e. you] better wash **our** [i.e. your] hands.

Style: Age of the Addressee

People talk differently to children and to adults.

- **Children:** Talking to a child would likely be in a **sing-song intonation** and **“baby talk”** and when writing to them, we use **shorter explicit sentences, simple grammar and common vocabulary items.** (Example 3 and 4)
- **Elderly people:** It is noticed that people tend to employ similar stylistic features when they talk to children like using **simpler vocabulary, less complex grammar and the use of “we” to refer to the addressee (in English).** (Example 5)

Style: Social Background of the addressee

(Book, example 6, P: 239)

- (a) Last week the British Prime Minister Mrs Margaret Thatcher met the Astralian Premier Mr. Bob Hawke in Canberra . . . Their next meeting will not be for several months.
 - (b) Las' week British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher met Astralian Premier Bob Hawke in Canberra . . . There nex' meeding won't be for sev'ral months.
- Based on the **social role, status and background** of the addressee, the speaker either **chooses** to modify his/ her speech towards or away from the style of the addressee.
 - This style modification is known as **the Accommodation Theory**.

Accommodation Theory: 1- Speech Convergence

1. **Speech Convergence:** Adapting a speech style that attempts to **reduce social distance** by using **forms** that are similar to those **used by the person we are talking to**.
 - It is a politeness strategy that tends to happen when the **speakers like one another** or where one of them wants **to please the other** by putting them at ease.
 - People converge their speech DOWNWARDS towards the **lesser linguistic proficiency** of their addressees who are often of a lower status.
 - **Example:** When a doctor addresses a patient and simplifies the vocabulary items he is using instead of using the jargon of the medical field.
 - People converge their speech UPWARDS towards the **more sophisticated linguistic proficiency** of their addressees who are often of a higher status.

Example 8

(Book, example 8, P:243)

A number of people who were learning Welsh were asked to help with a survey. In their separate booths in the language laboratory, they were asked a number of questions by an RP-sounding English speaker. At one point, this speaker arrogantly challenged the learners' reasons for trying to acquire Welsh which he called a "dying language which had a dismal future." In responding to this statement, the learners generally broadened their Welsh accents. Some introduced Welsh words into their answers, while others used an aggressive tone. One woman did not reply for a while, and then she was heard conjugating Welsh verbs very gently into the microphone.

Accommodation Theory: 2- Speech Divergence

2. **Speech Divergence: Deliberately** choosing a **different** language style not used by the addressee to **increase social distance**.
 - It is considered an **uncooperative speech behaviour** and tends to happen when a person **wants to show his cultural distinctiveness**, social status, ethnic identity... etc, **(Example 8)**
 - People who aspire to a **higher** social status will **diverge upwards** from the speech of those from the **same** social class.

Example 21

(Book, example 21, P: 259)

In our gerontological sociolinguistic context, we would argue that when, in intergenerational encounters, contextual features trigger an elderly (or even “aged”) identity in people, they will assume communicative strategies they believe to be associated with older speakers.

Register

- **Register:** It is an **occupational style** with **jargon** that describes the language of groups of people with common interests or jobs or the language used in situations associated with such groups.
 - **Jargon:** Specialised vocabulary specialists develop to talk about their specialty.
- Some linguists use the term **register** to refer to the **style of speech from slang to elevated variety**. Others restrict it to **specialised vocabulary**.
- **The difference:** **Style** is analysed along a scale of formality. **Register**, when distinguished from style, is associated with the **language of a particular group of people**.
 - **Other examples of registers:** Journalese, baby-talk, legalese, sports commentators, language of airline pilots, criminals, doctors, engineers, politicians, students ...etc.