

# CHAPTER 1 (An Introduction to Sociolinguistics by Janet Holmes)

## What Do Sociolinguists Study?

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# Introduction

- **Linguistics:** The scientific study of language.
- **Society:** The community of people living in a particular region and having shared customs, laws and organisations.
- **Sociolinguistics:** The study of the relationship between language and society.

# Introduction

- **Founder of sociolinguistics: Labov.**
- **What do sociolinguists study?**
  - 1) **Linguistic variables**  
(e.g.: pronunciation, syntax, morphology... etc.)
  - 2) **Social variables**  
(e.g.: age, gender, education, class, ethnicity... etc.)

# Example 1

(Book, example 1, P:1)

**Ray:** Hi mum.

**Mum:** Hi. You're late.

**Ray:** Yeah, that bastard Sootbucket kept us in again.

**Mum:** Nana's here.

**Ray:** Oh sorry. Where is she?

# Example 2

**(Book, example 2, P:1)**

**Ray:** Good afternoon, sir.

**Principal:** What are you doing here at this time?

**Ray:** Mr. Sutton kept us in, sir.



# Notes on Examples 1 and 2

- ❑ **Our linguistic choices are affected by:**
  1. **Who can hear us.**
  2. **Where we are talking.**
  3. **How we feel.**
  
- ❑ **Our linguistic choices can give us non-linguistic information:**
  - Ray's choice of words provides information about his **relationship** with his mother (**close** - informal) and with the principal (**distant** – formal).
  
- ❑ **Language can serve different functions:**
  - We can ask for information (**questions**), give information (**representatives**), express admiration or annoyance (**expressives**), offer something (**commissives**) and make changes (**declarations**).

# Example 3

## (Book, example 3, P:3)

Every afternoon my friend packs her bag and leaves her Cardiff office in southern Wales about 5 o'clock. As she leaves, her business partner says *goodbye Margret*, (she replies *goodbye Mike*), her secretary says *see you tomorrow* (she replies *bye Jill*) and the caretaker says *bye Mrs. Walker* (to which she responds *goodbye Andy*). As she arrives home she is greeted by *Hi mum* from her daughter, Jenny, *hello dear, have a good day?* from her mother and simply *you're late again* from her husband. Later in the evening the president of the local flower club calls to ask if she would like to join the club. *Good evening, is that Mrs. Billington?* She asks. No, it's Margret Walker. But my husbands' name is David Billington, Margret answers. What can I do for you? Finally a friend calls *Hello Meg, sut wyt ti?*

# Notes on Example 3

Speaker	Title
Business partner	Goodbye Margret
Secretary	“avoided mentioning names or titles”
Caretaker	Bye Mrs. Walker
Daughter	Hi mum
Mother	Hello dear, have a good day?
Husband	You’re late again
President of the local flower club	Good evening, is that Mrs. Billington?
Friend	Hello Meg, sut wyt ti?

- The lady was addressed with different names/ titles but they are all **appropriate**.
- The **relationship** between the addresser and addressee plays an important role.



# Example 4

(Book, example 4, P:4)

**Sam:** You seen our 'enry's new 'ouse yet? It's on 'alton you know.

**Jim:** I have indeed. I could hardly miss it Sam. Your Henry now owns the biggest house in Halton.

# Notes on Example 4

- The choice of **words** and ways of **pronunciations** convey **social** information.
  - The **[h]-dropping** reflects Sam and Jim's **different education** and **occupations**.
  - Although they come from the **same region**, they have **different social backgrounds** which is reflected in their speech.

# Example 5

(Book, example 5, P:5)

- (a) Refuse should be deposited in the receptacle provided.
- (b) Put your rubbish in the bin, Jilly.
- (c) Please tender exact fare and state destination.
- (d) Give me the right money and tell me where you're going.

# Notes on Example 5

- ❑ Both pairs of statements (a, b) and (c, d) convey the **same message** but they **differ** in **grammar** and **vocabulary**.
  - Using the **passive** grammatical structure , **impersonal** style and **less frequent** words **increases distance** and is **formal**.
  - Using the **active** grammatical structure, **personal** style, and **common** words **decreases distance** and is less **formal**.
- ❑ Although they have the **same** meaning, they are **NOT interchangeable**.
  - If a mother addresses her son with sentence (a), it would sound awkward and even funny. It would not fulfill the same purpose.

# Why Do People Speak Differently?

## ■ A- Social Factors:

### 1- The participants:

- a. Who is speaking? (speaker, writer)
- b. Who are they speaking to? (listener, reader)
  - i. Age, gender, education, occupation, social status, social distance, ethnicity ...etc. can all affect the linguistic choices of the participants.

### 2- The setting or social context of the interaction:

- Where are they speaking? **E.g.** : Home, school, mosque, shop, office, cafe...etc.

**3- The topic:** What is being talked about? **E.g.:** studying for an exam, going to a party, inviting a friend, ...etc.

**4- The function:** Why are they speaking? **E.g.:** Give information, order, offer, express feelings ...etc. (language functions).

# Why Do People Speak Differently?

## B- Social Dimensions:

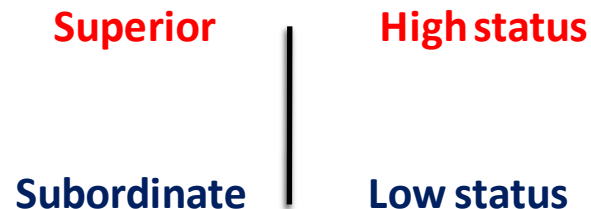
1. The **social distance** scale
2. The **status** scale
3. The **formality** scale
4. The **functional** scale

# 1- SOCIAL DISTANCE SCALE

- ❑ It is concerned with the **relationship** between the **participants**.
- ❑ It emphasises **how well** the **participants** know each other.
  - The **more formal** the **language** is, the **more distance** there is between the participants. When **distance INCREASES**, **solidarity DECREASES**.
    - **Formal language → more distance → less solidarity = Distant relationship**
      - **When Ray uses the title “sir” to address the principal in example (2).**
  - The **less formal** the **language** is, the **less distance** between the participants. When **distance DECREASES**, **solidarity INCREASES**.
    - **Informal language → less distance → more solidarity = Close relationship**
      - **When Ray addresses his mother with “mum” and uses swear words in example (1).**

# 2- STATUS SCALE

- It is also concerned with the **relationship** between **participants**.
  - If the **speaker** is of a **lower** status than the addresser, he/ she has to use **formal language** and use **titles** to show respect. However, if the **speaker** is of a **higher** status than the addressee, he/ she has the **choice** to either use **formal or informal language**.
    - Higher status can be attained by class, occupation, education... etc.
      - **Example (2):** Ray's choice of using "sir" shows that the principal was of a higher status.
      - **Example (3):** The use of "Mrs. Walker" by the caretaker reflects the higher status of Margret Walker.
      - **Example (4):** Sam's [h]-dropping reflects his lower social group status in the society as a whole.





# 3- FORMALITY SCALE

- ☐ It is concerned with the setting or the type of interaction.
  - The language used will be influenced by the formality of the setting.
  - The degrees of formality are often determined by solidarity and relationships but not always.
    - In a low court, the language is highly formal regardless of the personal relationships.

FORMAL	INFORMAL
At the bank: Addressing the bank manager at his office. At the mosque: Addressing a stranger.	At a café: Addressing a friend. At home: Addressing a sibling.
Written notices are mostly formal and impersonal.	Spoken language is mainly less formal than written one. For a friendly chat, people use colloquial.



## Setting:

Formal

High formality

More distance

Less solidarity

Informal

Low formality

Less distance

More  
solidarity



# 4- FUNCTIONAL SCALE

- ❑ **Language serves many functions but mainly two:**
  1. **Give objective information** → **Referential function**
  2. **Express feelings** → **Affective function**
- ❑ Our speech can have both functions but one function will dominate. The more referential information a message conveys, the less it tends to express the speaker's feelings and vice versa.
- ❑ **E.g.:** Ray's *"yeah, that bastard Sootbucket kept us in again"* conveys information about why he was late and also how he felt about it.

1- Referential	2- Referentially dominated	3- Affective	4- Affectively dominated
<i>"Speed limit should not be exceeded."</i>	<i>"You left your cute bag on the desk."</i>	<i>"I'm freezing"</i> uttered by a student to her friend in a very cold classroom.	<i>"I can't stand this headache my head will explode."</i> (patient to doctor)