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.)
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).
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

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

- 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.
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.
(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.
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 addressee, 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.

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

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