

CHAPTER SIX

REGIONAL AND SOCIAL VARIATION

Sources:

An Introduction to Sociolinguistics By Janet Holmes

Introducing Sociolinguistics By Miriam Meyerhoff

KNOWLEDGE OF A VARIETY

- ◉ **Types of knowledge of a variety:**
- ◉ **Passive Knowledge:** The ability to understand a variety but NOT speak it.
- ◉ **Active Knowledge:** The ability to produce and use a variety and not only understanding it.
- ◉ When sociolinguists want to study a variety, they collect and study authentic data. They record people talking in that variety but they end up being in the situation of the **Observer's Paradox**.

OBSERVER'S PARADOX

- ◎ **Observer's Paradox:** The paradox in which the observation of an event is influenced by the presence of the observer.
 - The term is coined by **Labov**.
 - As soon as a sociolinguist starts **recording** the participant, the participant becomes **aware** of being recorded and does **not** talk as he/ she **usually** does.

AVOIDING THE OBSERVER'S PARADOX

◎ To overcome this:

1- **Participant Observation:** Some sociolinguists **spend** much time **working** or **living** with the participants so that they **get used** to them and **talk** around them as they do with **family** and **friends**.

2- **Surreptitious Recording:** **Recording** participants **without** their prior **knowledge** of the recording i.e. using a **hidden** device and recording the participant **secretly**.

- It is considered a violation of privacy.

INTRODUCTION TO VARIATION

◎ People use a variety to **signal membership of a particular group and construct social identity.**

■ **The social identity includes:**

- 1- Social status
- 2- Gender
- 3- Ethnicity (race)
- 4- Education
- 5- Occupation
- 6- Religion ...etc.

EXAMPLE 1

Book, example 1, P:127

Telephone rings.

Pat: Hello.

Caller: Hello. Is Mark there?

Pat: Yes. Just hold on a minute.

Pat (to Mark): There's a rather well-educated young lady from Scotland on the phone for you.

- When we answer the phone, we are aware of the **non-linguistic** information the caller is conveying. Although the speaker says nothing explicitly about his/ her age, gender and education, we make pretty good **guesses** about them.

COMMON GUESSES

- ⦿ We can distinguish whether the speaker is a child or a male or female adult.
- ⦿ If the speaker has a distinctive regional accent, we can tell where he/ she comes from even from a short utterance.
- ⦿ **No two people speak exactly the same.**
 - Even a single vowel can be pronounced in hundreds of very slightly different ways that cannot be noticed by the listener.
 - They are measured by a sound spectrograph

DIALECTS AND ACCENTS

- ◉ **Dialects:** Linguistic varieties which are distinguishable by their **vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation**.
 - A dialect can be of a particular district (**regional dialect**), a class (**social dialect**) or a group of people (**ethnic dialect**).
- ◉ **Dialects** are **different** from **accents** in that **accents** are only about **pronunciation** whereas **dialects** include difference in **pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary**, too.
 - **Example:** In Arabic, we have Saudi dialect, Egyptian dialect ...etc. Within these dialects we can have different accents.

LANGUAGE VARIATION

○ A speaker **speaks one** language but **differs** in the **varieties** of that language. **Differences can be due to:**

- 1- Regional variation:** It identifies the speaker regionally or geographically.
- 2- Social variation:** It identifies the speakers' status in society.
- 3- Register:** It is the variety used by a group of people with common interests or jobs.
- 4- Style of language:** It is to change the variety across the formality scale i.e. from formal to informal and vice versa.

REGIONAL VARIATION

- Regional variation develops because people are separated by a common barrier like physical barriers, historical barriers, racial barriers or religious barriers.

Book, example 2, P:128

A British visitor to New Zealand decided while he was in Auckland he would look up an old friend from his war days. He found the address, walked up the path and knocked on the door.

“Giddy,” said the young man who opened the door. “What can I do for you?”

“I’ve called to see me old mate Don Stone,” said the visitor.

“Oh, he’s dead now mate,” said the young man.

The visitor was about to express condolences when he was thumped on the back by Don Stone himself. The young man said “here’s dad now mate,” as his father came in the gate.

- Differences in pronunciation only are attributed to accents:
 - Example: New Zealand’s “dad” sounds like England’s “dead”.
- Differences in vocabulary and grammar are attributed to dialects.
 - Example: England’s “single parent” = Australia’s “sole parent” = New Zealand’s “polo parent”

REGIONAL VARIATION

◎ British English vs. American English:

| Examples of Differences | BrE | AmE |
|-------------------------|---|---|
| Pronunciation | 1- car /kɑ: / 2- home /həʊm/ 3- class /klɑ:s/ 4- stop /stɒp/ | /kɑ:r/ /həʊm/ /klæs/ /stɑ:p/ |
| Vocabulary | 1- Pavement 2- Autumn 3- Flat 4- Lift | Sidewalk Fall Apartment Elevator |
| Grammar | 1- Have you got a pen? 2- She has got used to that. 3- He dived into the sea. 4- Have you eaten? | Do you have a pen? She has gotten used to that. He dove into the sea. Did you eat? |

EXAMPLE 3

Book, example 7, P: 136

Diana: Have you heard - Jonathan's engages to that girl from Cumbria!

Reg: She may be northern but I assure you she is very acceptable. Her father is a lord and a rich one at that! She has had the best education money can buy. Those traces from northern accent are fashionable these days my dear!

SOCIAL VARIATION

- ◉ Cumbrian dialect is **socially** thought to be **less prestigious** in England.
- ◉ It is a Northern **rural** dialect. Northern dialects **exchange**:
 - **/ʌ/** with **/ʊ/**. **Example**: cut /kʊt/ instead of /kʌt/.
 - **/ʊ/** with **/u:/**. **Example**: book /bu:k/ instead of /bʊk/.
- ◉ If a person **speaks** with a **regional** accent in England, he is most **unlikely** to belong to the upper class as **people** from the **upper class** would go to **private schools** and **learn** the **standard English** and therefore have **NO** regional accent.
- ◉ **Standard English** = **RP** (Received Pronunciation), (the Queen's English), (BBC English)
- ◉ So **RP** (i.e. Standard English) is a **SOCIAL ACCENT** and **not** a **regional** one because it **hides** the **speaker's regional origins**.
 - It is used by **well-educated** English speakers **worldwide** and **NOT** bound to a certain region.

SOCIAL VARIATION

- Standard English vs. Non-standard English: Linguistic forms which are **not** part of standard English are by definition **non-standard**.

| SOCIALLY | LINGUISTICALLY |
|---|---|
| Because non-standard forms are associated with the speech of less prestigious social groups, the label (non-standard) acquired negative connotation . | There is nothing inferior about the non-standard forms. They are simply different from the forms which are used by the more socially prestigious speakers . |

To avoid that implication the label (non-standard) has, sociolinguists use the term “**vernacular**” to refer to **non-standard** forms.

SOCIAL VARIATION

- ◉ **Social dialect** : A dialect that varies according to the speaker's social class.
- ◉ **Class**: The speaker's social prestige, status, or respect within community.
 - The definition of class depends on the society speakers belong to.
- ◉ So, the speakers' **socio-economic level** will **affect** the **way** they **speak**.
 - The **lower** the **socio-economic** level is, the **more regional variation** there is. The **higher** the level is, the **less regional variation** we have because **upper class** people mostly use **RP**.

SOCIAL CLASS - VOCABULARY AS A SOCIAL MARKER

- In the 1950s in England, many pairs of words were to identify the social group the speaker belongs to. The word either placed the speaker in the “U speakers” or the “non-U speakers”. “U = upper-class”
- Examples:

| U speakers | Non-U speakers |
|--------------|----------------|
| Sitting room | lounge |
| lavatory | toilet |
| sofa | settee |

SOCIAL CLASS - PRONUNCIATION AS A SOCIAL MARKER

Book, example 11, P: 142

Kim: Only uneducated people drop their h's.

Stephen: Let's hear you say "Have you heard about Hilda's new house that her husband left her? It cost her a heck of a lot to fix up." If you don't drop a single "h" in that sentence, you'll sound like one of Monty Python's upper-class twits!

- Dropping the /h/ in the beginning of a word (e.g.: have, heard, house, husband) is thought to be less prestigious.

EXAMPLE 4

Book, example 13, P:144

In New York City in 1964, a man was observed in **three** different department **stores** asking one store worker after another: “**where are the women’s shoes?**”. The man appeared not only to have a short memory, since he **repeated his question** to a shop assistant in each aisle on several different floors, he also appeared to be slightly deaf since he asked each person to **repeat their answer** to him. After receiving the answer he would scurry away and scribble something in his notebook. Oddest of all, when he finally made it to the **fourth floor** where the women’s shoe were, he showed absolutely no interest in them whatsoever but wandered around the floor asking. “Excuse me, **what floor is this?**”. When questioned by a puzzled store detective, he said he was a **sociolinguist!**

SOCIAL CLASS - PRONUNCIATION AS A SOCIAL MARKER

- ◉ In 1964, **Labov** went to **3** different department stores in **NY, USA** and asked the workers there the question :
“Where are the women’s shoes?” The answer was “the fourth floor”. He was interested in the pronunciation of the post-vocalic /r/. He concluded that:
 1. People with **higher socio-economic** level would **keep** the post-vocalic /r/.
 2. People with **lower socio-economic** level would **drop** the post-vocalic /r/.

EXAMPLE 5

Book, example 17, P: 149

Whina is 8 years old and she is telling a visitor the story of a film she has seen.

“And then these little flies went to go and they made a house by **theirself**, and this big fly was playing his guitar. He **play** and **play**. Then the little flies **was** making the house, and then the flies um sew um these leaves up all together.”

SOCIAL CLASS - GRAMMAR AS A SOCIAL MARKER

- ◉ In English speaking communities, it was found that children from **lower-class** families used **more vernacular verb forms** than children from middle-class families.
- ◉ **Examples:**

| Form | Higher-class | Lower-class |
|----------------|---|---|
| Past tense | I finished that book yesterday. | I finish that book yesterday. |
| Present tense | Michael walks to school every day. | Michael walk to school every day. |
| Negative forms | Nobody wants any chips. | Nobody don't want no chips. |
| Ain't form | Jim isn't stupid. | Jim ain't stupid. |

SOCIAL VARIATION - TERMS

- ◉ **Sociolect (social dialect):** A dialect that varies according to the speaker's social class.
 - A **sociolect** is **different** from a **dialect** because dialects **belong** to certain **regions** geographically (**regional variation**).
- ◉ **Idiolect:** A variety of a language that is **unique to a person**.
 - **No** two speakers **speak** the **same**.
 - **A person's idiolect depends on:**

| | |
|------------------------|----------------------|
| 1- Regional background | 2- Ethnic background |
| 3- Education | 4- Occupation |
| 5- Religion | 6- Psychology |
| 7- Personality | |

SOCIAL VARIATION - TERMS

- ◉ **Ethnic dialect:** A variety of a language spoken by a particular ethnic group.
 - Using an ethnic dialect with speakers of the same ethnic background generally signals solidarity.
 - **Example:** African American Vernacular English (AAVE).
 - Also called “Black English” or “Ebonics”.
 - It is spoken by African Americans in the USA.
 - It arose from creoles used by slaves.
- ◉ **Characteristics:**
 - Absence of copula “be”.
 - Multiple negation: “You ain’t heard nothing”, “I don’t know nobody”
 - Final consonant cluster reduction, no voiceless stops: **list**, **cold** “/lɪs/” “/kɔʊl/”.
 - Omission of third person -s and plural -s: “he like reading”, “seven car”
 - Slang Expressions: “what’s poppin’?” = a greeting
 - Use of slang words: “dope” = cool
 - Phonological features such as exchanging /^{ɔ̃}/ with /d/: **the** “/də/” and /aɪ/ with /a:/ :**high** “/ha:/”