

## A STUDY OF SOCIOLINGUISTICS WITH A SPECIAL EMPHASIS TO LANGUAGE LEARNING

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### ABSTRACT

Sociolinguistics is the study of the characteristics of language varieties. The characteristics of their speakers as these three constantly interact, change and change one another in their speech community. (Fishman 1972, P.4). Sociolinguistics is concerned with the study of speech acts. The speech act lays stress on more than the formal properties of a message; it stresses the relationship between linguistic form and the social meaning in the interpersonal functions of speech. Many philosophers gave a classification of speech acts, where the use of language itself brought about a social action.

Ex: a. Declarative  
b. Directive

**Keywords:** Sociolinguistics, language, linguistics

### INTRODUCTION

In fact, language is always meant for society. The social interaction and communication of ideas or messages can be possible only through language. Though the history and the function of language have been the subject of studies and research since the prehistoric period, but sociolinguistics as a subject has been introduced only recently, perhaps in the late sixties. It does not mean that the study of language in relation to society as an invention of the 1960s, but on the contrary, there is a long tradition in the study of dialects and in the general study of the relations between word meaning and culture. Since in the 1960s, both these began to be considered as the subjects within sociolinguistics. It throws light on both the nature of language and the nature of the society. The purpose of language is to represent the nature and the culture

of the society. In society, on every step of life, language is required to fulfill the essential needs of life or to identify the living and non-living things in this world.

Different forms of language are used for different purposes. We express language through either speech or graphic medium. The speech can be a bit different from the graphic expression. The grammatical rules and the selection of appropriate words are required in graphic expression, but in speech, some relaxation may be allowed. There are a number of formal and informal to meet different methods of social interaction, for example, letter, application, report, notice, agenda etc.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Applications of Sociolinguistics**

A sociolinguist might determine through study of social attitude that a particular vernacular would not be considered appropriate language use in a business or professional setting. Sociolinguists might also study the grammar, phonetics, vocabulary, and other aspects of this sociolect much as dialectologists would study the same for a regional dialect. The study of language variation is concerned with social constraints determining language in its contextual environment. Code switching is the term given to the use of different varieties of language in different social situations. William Labov is often regarded as the counter of the study of sociolinguistics. He introduced the quantitative study of language variation and change, making the sociology of language in to a scientific discipline. It differs from sociology of language in that the focus of sociolinguistics is the effect of the society on the language, while the latter's focus is on the language's effect on the society.

## **METHODS**

### **1. Language and a Society:**

In a society, we find different languages and dialects to represent the speakers' native

place. Every country has its own standard language with a number of dialects which are divided in to different isoglosses. They have their own lexicon, grammar and culture. Two dialects may be comprehensible if they are neighboring isoglosses. But if the distance is greater, the two dialects may not be comprehensible; in this case the speakers have faced the difficulty in communication.

## 2. Socio-linguistics Variables

In the field of sociolinguistics typically take a sample population and interview them, assessing the realization of certain sociolinguistics variables. Labov specifies them, ideal sociolinguistics variable to

- be high in frequency,
- have a certain immunity from conscious suppression,
- be an integral part of larger structures, and
- be easily quantified on a linear scale.

Phonetics variables tend to meet these criteria and are often used, as a grammatical variable and more, rarely, lexical variables. Example for phonetic variables are: the frequency of the glottal stop, the height or backness of a vowel or the realization of word endings. An example of grammatical variables is the frequency of negative concord.

## 3. Role of Language in a Society

In a society, we find different languages and dialects to represent the speakers, native place. Every country has its own standard language with a number of dialects which are divided in to different isoglosses. They have their own lexicon, grammar and culture. Two dialects may be comprehensible if they are neighbouring isoglosses. If the distance is greater two dialects may be comprehensible. In this case the speakers have to face difficulty in communication. The dialect is used on regional basis: and sometimes it covers a very large area and has variations on some frequent distance, for example, the

Germanic had in the beginning , three major dialects: North Germanic, East Germanic and West Germanic. As all these three dialectal varieties were spoken in a large area, each had sub varieties.

A man living in society established his position there through language. It is the only means of communication in the society. He shares his ideas, emotions, beliefs, feelings, joy and distress through common codes prescribed, for each of them in the society. He learns language in the society, family, friends and schools. In family, he learns the native language. He shares his native language and the Standard language among his friends. He learns the standard language in the school. He learns words of common use and relations in a family. He shares them among friends and learns new words of sports etc., Language thus plays a very important role in society. The speakers of one language are categorized in a language community. For instance, English is spoken in so many countries, such as Britain, America and India. The English of America is different from that of Britain and India, similarly Indian English is different from that of same, but the language is one in all the three countries therefore the language community is one.

#### **4. Approaches to Sociolinguistics:**

Sociolinguistics is partly empirical and partly theoretical – partly a matter of going out and amassing bodies of fact and partly of sitting and thinking. The common approach to sociolinguistics can be fairly productive, whether it is based on facts collected in a systematic way as part of research or simply on one's own experience. But in both the cases, the study is based on the analytical facts. Society has been divided into different groups on the basis of castes, classes, religion etc. They all gave distinct ways of communication. The people belonging to upper class speak a civilized language, which has grammatical accuracy and well selected appropriate words because of their educated and higher class people. The people belonging to lower class cannot avail all these opportunities even after they are educated. It is because they have

to learn the language. They cannot inherit it from their family tradition. Their interaction also will be cannot inherit it from their family tradition. Their interaction also will be with then lower class people. Hence, the language of both the classes will vary. A religious person will use the terms relating to religions in his speech which a common man lacks.

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### FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS IN SOCIOLINGUISTICS

There are a few fundamental concepts on which many sociolinguistics inquiries depends on

- High prestige and low prestige varieties
- Social Network
- Internal vs. external language
- Differences according to class
- Class aspiration
- Social language codes
- Elaborated code
- Deviation from standard language varieties
- Covert prestige
- Different according to age groups
- Differences according to gender
- Minimal response
- Questions
- Turn –taking
- Changing the topic of conversation
- Self –disclosure
- Verbal aggression
- Listening and attentiveness
- Dominance versus subjection
- Politeness
- Complimentary language
- Sociology of language
- Language Variation

### SOCIOLINGUISTICS IN RELATION WITH THE SOCIOLOGY OF LANGUAGE

The study of society in relation to language defines what is generally called the *Sociology of Language*. Sociolinguistics throws light on the nature of language in general, and the characteristics of some language in particular. Society is a notional little

world which has its own pattern of language, and where everybody has exactly the same language. Every member of a society knows the same constructions and the same words, with the same pronunciations and the same range of meanings for every single word in the language. Sometimes, the difference in pronunciation may occur in a society in some situations for various reasons. One reason may be, a person spends sometimes with the person of other society or he may have spent his major members of the society, just learning to talk, must necessarily be different from everybody else, but child language is the domain of a branch of psychology rather than sociology. Psychology can provide general principles of language acquisition which will allow us to predict in every respect the ways the language of children in this society deviates from that of the adults.

Man can be distinguished from other animals because he has language to express himself. Man, of course, learns the language in the society, but the language structure always follows the social structure and culture. The language is a reflection of social structure. It reflects the depth of personal relationship between persons. Every relation has a name in Indian societies which shows the depth of relationship. For example chacha, tau, mama, mausa, jija, shali etc. Thus, their language expresses not only thoughts and feelings of the speaker, but also the social culture and tradition. In Persian, plural verb is used to pay respect. There a rich man or a man of status is considered as more than one common man. Sociolinguistics thus is a new branch of linguistics born out of the integral relationship between language and society. It generally, includes the following topics.

- Phonetics
- Morphology
- Syntax
- Semantics
- Vocabulary
- Proverbs
- Sayings

In Sociolinguistics, phonetics does not refer to the mechanism of speech. The speech may be shorter or longer strings of linguistics items uttered on specific occasions for particular purposes. Various kinds of spoken texts in order to concentrate on what is called face to-face interaction. We may ignore all kinds of important but impersonal communications such as the mass media, a wide range of activities will still be left behind, such as: conversations, quarrels, jokes, committee, meetings, interviews, introductions, lessons, teaching, chit-chat and hosting.

### LINGUISTICS FEATURES OF SOCIOLINGUITICS

Varieties of a language that are formed in various geographical regions involve a change in the pronunciation as well as vocabulary. Such changes result in the formation of a distinctly different variety of the language or a dialect. Sometimes these changes may be present within the same geographical region due to the social differences between different economic sections, e.g. working class and aristocracy. These changes result in class dialects. Variation in language may also be due to the specific area of human activity in which language is used. Again taking the example of English this language is used in different fields. – of law, religion, science, sports etc. In each of these areas there is a specific vocabulary and manner of use of English, which defines the legal language, the scientific language etc. This variety of language according to its use is called **register**. Sociolinguistics examine the particular characteristics of different registers, i.e. legal register, scientific register, etc., to see how these differ. This kind of study use in communication is not arbitrary or uncontrolled, but is governed by rules of situational and contextual appropriateness.

### SOCIOLOGY OF LANGUAGE

It focuses on the language's effect on the society. It is closely related to the field of sociolinguistics which focuses on the effect of the society on the language. It is the way that social dynamics affect individual and group language use. It would have to do with who is 'authorized' to use what language, with whom and under what conditions. It would have to do with how an individual or group identity is established by the language that they have available for them to

use. It would seek to understand individual expression, one's investment in the linguistics tools that one has access to in order to bring oneself to other people.

These sociology of language includes the study of attitudes to language held by social groups, for instance, they may consider some languages or dialects as more important. It includes the planning of language education, e.g. which languages should be the medium of instruction, which language should be taught as second languages: and language policy, i.e. which languages are legally and constitutionally recognized and what status they are give. The sociology of language is thus linked with other aspects of our social worlds, the political, economic, educational, etc.

### **LANGUAGE AS A SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR**

Language is one of the most powerful emblems of social behaviour. In the normal transfer or information through language, we use language to send vital social messages about who we are, where we come from, and who we associate with. It is often shocking to realize how extensively about a person's background, character, and intentions based simply upon the person's language, dialect.

### **CONCLUSION**

Sociolinguistics has become an increasingly important and popular field of study, as certain cultures around the worlds expand their communication base and intergroup and interpersonal relations takes on escalating significance. Language use symbolically represents fundamental dimensions for social behaviour and human interaction. The notion is simple, but the way in which language reflects behaviour can often be complex. A slightly different concern with language and society focuses more closely on the effect of particular kinds of social situations on language structure. The study of language in its social context tells us quite a bit about how we organize our social relationships within a particular community. It is based on simple vocabulary choice but about the relationship and social position of the speaker and



addresses. Sociolinguistics thus offers a unique opportunity to bring together theory, description, and application in the study of language.

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