

Sociolinguistics/CC-14 (Sem.3)

What is Sociolinguistics?

When we talk of sociolinguistics, two terms catch our attention i.e. “Socio” or “pertaining to society” and “linguistics or “pertaining to language”. A layman can guess that sociolinguistics has something to do with language and society. Technically, sociolinguistics is the branch of linguistics that deals with the study of language in relation to society. Language and society are like hand and glove. They are inter-related as language can't exist without society. Sociolinguistics can throw much light both on the nature of language and the nature of society. We talk in different styles in different social contexts.

Let us take an example of Hari when he talks with his boss in the office.

Hari : Good afternoon, sir.

Boss : There is a meeting at 7.00pm, I want you to be around.

Hari : Yes sir, I will surely be here.

This response reflects Hari's awareness of the social factors which influence the choice of appropriate ways of speaking in different social contexts. Sociolinguistics is concerned with the relationship between language and the context in which it is used.

To be precise, sociolinguists study the relationship between language and society. They explore the social function of the language and the way it is used to convey the meaning. Sociolinguists explain why we speak differently in different social contexts. According to **Fishman** sociolinguists are interested in knowing “who speaks, which language to whom and when”.

Varieties of language

Each language has many varieties and in a way language is a sum of all varieties. Ferguson (1971) defines variety of language as ‘any body of speech patterns which is sufficiently homogenous to be analyzed by available techniques of synchronic description and which has a sufficiently large repertory of elements and their arrangements or processes with broad enough semantic scope to function in all formal contexts of communication’.

Therefore, variety is defined in terms of ‘human speech patterns’ presumably sounds, words, grammatical features, etc. which we can uniquely associate with some external factors like geographical area or a social group.

Language varieties not only indicate a speaker’s origin or aspects of their social identity (for instance, their social class or ethnic group) but they also carry certain social values related to the speakers who use them and the contexts in which they are habitually used. Language varieties therefore constitute a resource that may be drawn on in interaction with others.

Varieties can be classified on the basis of

- a) **Users** – The focus is on language variations based on its users for example dialects and accents
- b) **Use** – The focus is on language variations based on its use for example register.
- c) **Social relations** – The focus is on variations based on social relationships among speakers.

DIALECTS

Every language is a collection of many dialects. Dialect is related to variations, close to regional i.e. based on the place, region or area where the users live.

Dialect also refers to language variation that comes from a group of users that are relative in numbers, living in one particular place, region or area.

The users of a dialect have certain features that mark them as people who have the same dialect. **For example**, people who use Urdu with dialect of Dakhini (spoken in South India) have their own specific features that are different from others who have the dialect of Khariboli (spoken mostly in Delhi). But they can communicate well with each other; those dialects are the varieties of the same language, Urdu.

Regional dialect is spoken in one part of a country based on region. **For example**, the English spoken in Yorkshire and Scotland are regional dialects.

Similarly, Hindi spoken in Banaras and Bihar are regional dialects. Regional dialects tend to show less differences from their close neighbours and greater differences from distant neighbours (Spolsky, 1998:29).

Mark the differences between British and American English:

American

Do you have a match?

She has gotten used to the pollution.
He dove in, head first.

Did you eat yet?

British

Have you got a cigarette?

She's got used to the pollution.
He dived in head first.

Have you eaten yet?

A **social dialect** is also called a socio-lect and is spoken by a group of people belonging to a particular social class. e.g English spoken by upper, middle and the lower class in London are social dialects.

Registers

The term register refers to the varieties based on occupation characterized by variation in lexicon. It is the specialist use of language related to various occupations. We might have observed when we go to a doctor we come across some words which we may not use in our everyday conversation.

For example, Pulse rate, Blood pressure, stethoscope, prescription.

Similarly we can think of the register of law, the register of advertising, the register of education and other professions.

According to **Halliday** (1964) three variables viz field, tenor and mode of discourse determine registers. Field is the subject matter or the topic of the discourse, tenor is the relationship between the participants and the mode is the channel of communication i.e. written or spoken.

For example Field can be Science –Zoology, Tenor: Student -Teacher, Mode: oral, lecture.

Standard Language

A standard variety of language is the variety which is given either legal or quasi-legal status. It is usually the variety used in the media, for education, for official purposes etc

. For a standard variety a recognized dictionary, a grammar, and a system of pronunciation is available. A non- standard variety is not given the legal status and generally no references are available.

Multilingualism

Multilingualism is the use of more than one language, either by an individual speaker or by a group of speakers. It is believed that multilingual speakers outnumber monolingual speakers in the world's population. More than half of all Europeans claim to speak at least one language other than their mother tongue but many read and write in one language. Always useful to traders.

Multilingualism is advantageous for people wanting to participate in globalization and cultural openness. Owing to the ease of access to information facilitated by the Internet, individuals' exposure to multiple languages is becoming increasingly possible. People who speak several languages are also called **polyglots**.

Multilingual speakers have acquired and maintained at least one language during childhood, the so-called first language (L1). The first language is sometimes also referred to as the mother tongue.

Bilingualism

Bilingualism (or more generally: Multilingualism) is the phenomenon of speaking and understanding two or more languages. The term can refer to individuals (individual bilingualism) as well as to an entire society (social bilingualism).

The term can also refer to the corresponding scientific research which studies the phenomenon itself. Bilingualism, multilingualism and polyglotism can all be used as synonyms for the same phenomenon.

Code Mixing : A code can be a language, variety or style. If a word from the other code is used in the native language, inspite of having a word for a concept, it is called code mixing.

For example, saying 'tum mera wait karo bahar' instead of saying 'tum mera intizaar karo bahar' in Urdu is an example of code mixing.

Code Switching

Alternating between two codes is called code switching. In other words, if we make use of two different codes simultaneously or switch from one code to another in a discourse, it is code switching.

For example *Tum kal kahaan thi*, I wanted to talk to you.

There are **four types** of switching. I have explained all the four kinds with reference to a bilingual speaker who knows Hindi and English.

Intersentential switching: It is the kind of switching in which the switching occurs outside the sentence or clause level i.e. each clause or sentence is in one language or the other. e.g. Hindi/English. woh kitaab mujhe mili that you were looking for.

Intra sentential switching: In this type the switching occurs within the clause or sentence. e.g. bacche aaj simply good khel rahe hae.

Tag- switching: It is the kind of switching in which tag words or set phrases from one language are inserted into another language. e.g. You are from Delhi, Hai na?

Intra-word switching: The switching in which the change occurs within a word boundary is intra-word switching. e.g. □ □ □ □ schools.

Diglossia

The term diglossia coined by Ferguson (1959) is defined as a situation in which 'two varieties of language exist side by side throughout the community, with each variety having a definite role to play'.

Ferguson explained diglossia under **nine rubrics** ; function, prestige, literary heritage, acquisition, standardization, stability, grammar, lexicon , and phonology.

Function : Function is the most crucial criterion for diglossia. There are two distinct varieties of the same language i.e. H – high and L- low. There are situations in which only H is appropriate and others in which only L is appropriate with very little or no overlap.

Prestige: Speakers in diglossic communities consider H as superior, more elegant and more logical and L as inferior to such an extent that they may deny its existence.

Literary heritage: A considerable amount of the written literature of a language is in the H variety which is appreciated and respected by the speech

community and contemporary literary work in H is considered to be a continuation of this great tradition.

Acquisition: The L variety is considered to be acquired by a child in natural settings at home whereas the H variety is learned in more formal settings like in school.

Standardization: It is the H variety of language for which recognised grammars, dictionaries, pronunciation guides, and books of rules for correct usage are written.

Stability: Diglossia typically lasts for several centuries and is an extremely stable phenomenon. Tension between H and L in diglossia is relieved by the development of mixed, intermediate forms of language in which features of both the varieties are available. Using H words in L is common however using L words in H is not usual.

Grammar: There are remarkable differences in H and L : H has grammatical categories not present in L and has an inflectional system of nouns and verbs which is much reduced or totally absent in L. For example, Classical Arabic has three cases in the noun, marked by endings; colloquial dialects have none. It can be said that the grammatical structures of L varieties are simpler than their corresponding H varieties.

Lexicon: Most of the vocabulary of H and L is shared. There are some words like technical and learned terms in H which have no equivalent in L and similarly there are some words such as for homey objects like farm, cooking utensils etc in L which have no equivalents in H. It all depends on the probability of a word to be frequently used in H or L variety.

However, the existence of the paired items, one in H and one in L, is the striking feature of diglossia as far as lexicon is concerned.

For example, in Greek the H word for 'house' is *ikos* and the L word is *spi'ti*

Phonology: The range of differences in the phonological system of two varieties vary. The phonological systems of the two varieties may be quite close as in Greek or extremely divergent as in the Swiss- German case.

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