

INTRODUCTION: WHAT DO SOCIOLINGUISTS STUDY?**1. Language behavior from a social point of view**

Anecdote (Trudgill, 1974):

Two Englishmen who have never met before come to face to face in a railway compartment – they start talking about the weather.

While it is important *what* the other person says about the weather, it is far more important -- and most informative! -- *how* he says it.

Two aspects of their language behavior from a social point of view:

- (i) the function of language in establishing a *social relationship*;
- (ii) the role played by language in conveying *information about the speaker -- clue-bearing role*.



social background – education, economic status !
geographical background -- accent!
ideas and attitudes -- personality!
etc.

“These aspects of linguistic behavior are reflections of the fact that there is a close inter-relationship between language and society”.

Trudgill: *Sociolinguistics: An introduction*. (1974)

2. Basic linguistic concepts:

Linguistic competence: knowledge of the grammar by the native speaker of the language.

Linguistic performance: the way this knowledge is used in communication.

"Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community, who knows its (the speech community's) language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of this language in actual performance."

Chomsky: *Aspects of the theory of syntax* (1965)

His *asocial* view has been received by many linguists as a *sterile* approach -- why?

Theoretical linguistics is interested in the *cognitive and biological* apparatus of language storing and processing.

Sociolinguistics is interested in describing language as a *social phenomenon*: it attempts to establish causal links between language and society.

Hymes (1972) extends the notion of competence to cover most of the aspects that Chomsky attributed to performance.

'communicative competence'



knowledge of the rules of a language *plus* the ability to use these rules in socially and culturally appropriate ways

Labov (1972) He recognizes systematicity in *performance* as well as in competence;

All studies of language in its socio-cultural context assume that

LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE (=knowledge of a language) ALSO MEANS KNOWING *HOW TO USE THAT LANGUAGE*.

3. Linguistic variations

It is necessary to distinguish between the speech repertoire of the *community*



“SPEECH REPERTOIRE”

and the speech repertoire of the *individual*



“VERBAL REPERTOIRE”

SPEECH REPERTOIRE: the choices available for the individual.

VERBAL REPERTOIRE: the utilization of available varieties.

Sociolinguists study the *relationship between language and society*:

Different social contexts trigger differences in speech - why?
How do social relationships affect speech?
How does speech reveal social identity?

What is the role of linguistic variation?

- Vocabulary variations;
- Pronunciation variations;
- Variations in grammatical structures;
- Dialectal variations.

Why do we say the *same* things in *different* ways?

Study the examples and the exercises on pp. 1-12.

4. Social factors

Sociolinguists identify the factors relevant to the employing of certain variety of speech.

These factors may be grouped as follows:

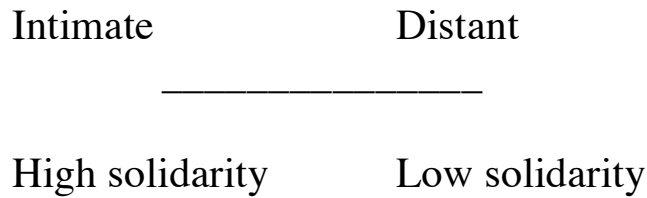
- a. The **participants**:
Who is speaking?
Who are they speaking **to**?
- b. The **setting** or social contexts of the interaction:
where are they speaking?
- c. The **topic**: **what** is being talked about?
- d. The **function**: **why** are they speaking?

5. Social dimensions

The relevance of *four* social dimensions in the realization of the linguistic variety of choice may be analyzed by identifying degrees of

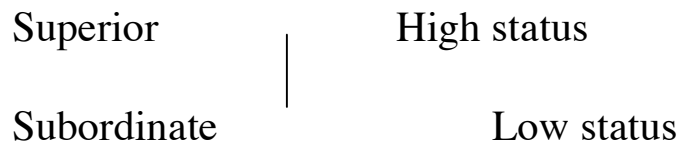
- (i) participant relationships
- (ii) setting or type of interaction
- (iii) purpose or topic of interaction

The solidarity-social distance scale



Our linguistic choice is determined by the degree of our knowledge/relationship with the relevant person. Provide an example!

The status scale



The relevance of social status may determine our linguistic choice.

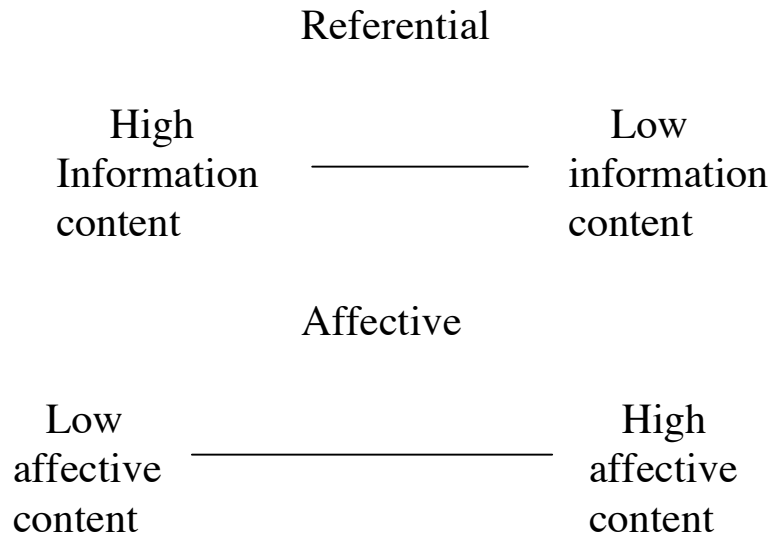
Provide an example!

The formality scale



The influence of social setting and the type of interaction is relevant to our linguistic choice. Provide an example!

The referential and affective function scales



There is an interaction between referential (=information content) and the affective (how someone is feeling) scales. In general, the higher the information content, the affective content is lower -- explain and provide an example!

6. Looking for explanations

The objective of sociolinguists is to

- (i) establish a theory which accounts for the ways language functions in society;
- (ii) provide explanations of linguistic choices speakers employ in communication.