

ASPECTS OF SOCIOLINGUISTICS

By: Tumpal H. Dongoran*

Abstract

This paper explains and describes of society for language pedagogy. In explaining and describing the concepts of society for language pedagogy, the social sciences offer a very useful contribution, such as: Sociology and anthropology provide the tools for the systematic study of societies and cultures which form the necessary contexts for as study of language. Then, it provides concepts, mechanisms, and systematic information for a study of language in a social, cultural, and interpersonal matrix. Finally, the sociology of language suggests ways of looking at languages and language teaching in a sociological way and may lead to an interspersed second language teaching and learning as one of society's ways of establishing cross-lingual and ethnic group contact.

Key words: Sociolinguistics, sociology, social sciences, anthropology, pedagogy, social psychology, linguistics, direction, extend, derive.

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1. Introduction

In sociolinguistics all the coverage and efforts in anthropology, sociology, social psychology, and linguistics to relate systematically to society and culture. In this paper, the writer will discuss three major directions that characterize the development of sociolinguistics as a distinct discipline. One is a *direction of general or theoretical linguistics into a study of language in society*. The second has extended the concept of *the native speaker's linguistic competence into the abstract study of language to concrete acts of language use: an 'ethnography of speaking'*. The third derives more distinctly from sociology and is often referred to as *'sociology of language': it is the study of speech communities*. The three orientations cannot be kept strictly apart, but they provide convenient headings for characterizing the principal directions in sociolinguistics. All the three have relevance for language pedagogy.

2. The Study of Language in its Social Context

Nearest to the kind of linguistics, is the first trend, the study of language in its social context – to borrow the phrase used by one of its chief exponents, William Labov (1971, 1972). In Labov's view, shared by several other sociolinguists, the study of language within the context of speech community is linguistics. The common topics of linguistic analysis, phonology, morphology, syntax, discourse analysis, and semantics, continue to be the areas to be investigated; but studying them in a 'pure' and 'abstract' form, as linguists from Saussure to Chomsky have done, leaves out from linguistic enquiry what is most interesting, the infinite varieties of language use. In the choice between *langue* and *parole*, or *competence* and *performance*, in which Saussure opted for the study of *langue* and Chomsky for the study of *competence*, as the proper subject of linguistics, the sociolinguists made the opposite choice. For them it is the variability of *parole* or *performance* that constitutes the substance of linguistics: 'It seems natural enough that the basic data for any form of general linguistics would be language as it is used by native speakers communicating with each other' (Labov 1971: 153).

The study of language in its social context starts from the assumption that speech varies in different social circumstances and that there are speech varieties within a speech community. It is the business of linguistics

to account for these and to study the rules of these variations as normal phenomena of language use. Labov himself, for example, has investigated quite specific phonological features in the use of English in New York, such as varieties of /t/ or the voiceless fricative /θ/ as in *thing* or *thick*. The 'prestige form' of these phoneme appears sometimes in the stigmatized form of an affricative or stop (*ʃing* or *ting*). Labov has been able to show that individual New Yorkers do not use one or the other form of /θ/ in the casual speech, careful speech, in constructive reading style, or in reading a word list. In other words, there is a stylistic gradient. But there are also social differences. There is less stylistic differentiation among upper - middle - class speakers than among working - class or lower class speakers. According to Labov, a sociolinguistic variable is a linguistic feature which can be systematically related to some non - linguistic feature in the social context: the *speaker, the addressee, the audience or the setting*. Thus, some features such as /θ/ in New York vary systematically according to the *degree of formality of language use and the social class of the speaker*.

It is clear that taking into account the many social and regional variations of language use makes the description of a language and even more complex task than if they are disregarded. The language teacher faces a similar problem when he asks himself whether to teach language as it is spoken or whether he should confine his teaching to an idealized 'standard' variety. In the latter case the task is simplified, but the student may find that no native speaker uses the language quite the way he was taught: the student is not sensitized to the differences among groups of speakers and to the social significance of these differences. Language in social context is closer to *real life, but variations make the teaching - learning task more complex*.

The effect of this trend in sociolinguistics is closely more differentiated description of linguistics: a phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexicology in which the distinctions in the use of language by different groups in society and by individuals in different situations are not rubbed out.

3. Ethnography of Communication

A second major direction of sociolinguistics is the study of the individual's communicative activity in its social setting, referred to as 'ethnography of speaking', or more widely as 'ethnography of communication' (Sherzer 1977). This approach to sociolinguistics *extends the area of linguistics beyond the study of formal properties of utterances to the study of the social contexts and of the participants in acts of communication*. The model of the speech act can be used as starting point with more stress on the interpersonal functions of speech acts and on the relationships between linguistic form and social meaning.

The act of communication is therefore seen not as basically an exchange of linguistic messages, but rather as a socially meaningful episode in which the use of language plays a part only inasmuch as the social rules and functions are already previously agreed upon or are known by the participants in the verbal exchange. Thus in a given situation, it is the sequence of interpersonal events that sets the stage for given messages. It has been demonstrated that if an individual breaks the rules of social act by saying something unexpected he can cause confusion or annoyance in the speech partner in the episode. Experiments to prove this point, have been conducted by Garfinkel (1967:38 - 44), can be illustrated by this example:

'The victim waved his hand cheerily':

A: "How are you?"

B: "How am I in regard to what? My health, my finances, my school work, my peace of mind, my . . . ?"

A: (Read in the face and suddenly out of control.)

"Look! I was just trying to be polite. Frankly, I don't give a damn how are you."

The characteristic of language use are looked at more as indicators of a social relationship or as markers of individual interpretations of the events than as examples of syntactic constructions.

An early task of the ethnography of communication was to develop a conceptual scheme for the analysis of speech events in their social setting. Lets take as examples models developed by a linguist, Jakobson, a social psychologist, Robinson, and a linguist and anthropologist, Hymes, here we can see that they have much in common:

	Jakobson (1960)	Robinson (1972)	Hymes (1972, 1972a)
1	addresser addressee	addresser/emitter addressee/receiver	speaker/sender/addressor receiver/audience/addressee
2	message	message/message form/ verbal act	speech act/message (key/genre)
3	contact	contact social relationship control	Channel
4	context	extra linguistic world situation	situation/setting/scene
5		topic/prime focus of verbal act	topic/message content
6	code	language	code/forms of speech: language/dialect/variety
7	functions	functions	purposes/outcomes/ goals/ends

Table 1: Categories of language events.

1. One essential set of concepts is *the participants* in the speech act: the speaker and listener, writer and reader, or in more general terms, addresser and addressee, or performer (emitter) and receiver. Hymes rightly points out that some speech acts are not dyadic, that is, they do not require an addressee: the monologue, thinking aloud, or prayer. In other cases, the relationship is triadic involving a third participant, hearer, or audience. Another type of triad is source, speaker (spokesman, interpreter,) and addressee.
2. The next major concept is the *message* itself, in most cases a verbal utterance, but sometimes a non-verbal act of communication in its own right or accompanying the verbal utterance. The smallest unit of speaking is usually referred to as the *speech act*. The next larger recognized of unit of speech activity – *conversation, discussion, lecture, etc.* – constitutes a *speech event*, which occurs in a speech situation.

Hymes used the literary term *genre* to describe generically different speech events such as 'poem, myth, tale, proverb, riddle, curse, prayer, oration, lecture, commercial, form, letter, editorial' (Hymes 1972a: 65). Speech acts and events can also be distinguished by their *tone or style*, or in Hymes' terminology, the *key*, for example, *serious, solemn, ironic, comic, formal or informal*.

3. A speech act is carried by a medium or *channel* (air, paper, or wire) which in physical terms establishes a relationship between participants. But the relationship can also be viewed psychologically as a social *contact or role relationship* between the participants. Talks reflects differences in social role between individuals; thus, a child is likely to talk differently to his parents, a friend, or a teacher.
4. The speech event takes place in a setting or scene, the *speech situation*. The situation, is interpreted by the participants may determine the *topic, the verbal behavior, and expectation of the participants*. This, characteristic uses of language and language behavior go with a classroom lesson, a committee meeting, a funeral, an evening party, or, as so vividly portrayed by Malinowski (1923), emphasized the importance for an understanding of language of 'the context of situation', the concept adopted by Firth and many other British linguists.
5. A message is further distinguished by its *topic, or content*, which often but not always relates to the external non-linguistic reality, the situation, or context in which the speech event occurs.
6. In a given situation participants select a particular *variety of speech, dialect, language, code, or register*, which is likely to depend on the situational and relationship between the participants or the topic. As we have seen, sociolinguistics differs most clearly from linguistics in the Saussurian sense by the importance it attributes to varieties of speech and the systematic speech variations among speakers and within speakers. The study of the social roles, situations, or functions that control the use of different speech varieties in predictable ways, has therefore become of a particular significance to the development of sociolinguistics.
7. The conceptual schemes acknowledge that different speech acts have different *purposes or functions*. Several attempts have been made to define exhaustively the functions of speech.

One of the oldest and simplest categorizations is Bühler's threefold division of the functions of speech into *expressive, representational, and conative*. Searle's (1969) functional analysis distinguishes five categories. Jakobson's six categories of functions (1960) were outlined in a paper which specially concerned with the stylistic or poetic function. Halliday's scheme, developed in a book on functions of language (1973), has seven categories. Robinson's (1972) scheme with fourteen categories is probably the most detailed and elaborate one. Wilkins (1976) offers a similar set of categories. As has been already pointed out, any utterance may fulfill more than one function at a time. What functional elements, then, can be categorized? This can be seen in the following table:

Bühler (1934)	Jakobson (1960)	Searle (1969)	Robinson (1972)	Halliday (1973)
expressive	emotive	Expressive (express feelings and attitudes)	Regulation of self, expression of affect marking of emitter including avoidance conversation	Expression of identity, personal ('Here I come')
-	phatic	-	Role relationship marking encounter regulation	Interactional ('me and you')
representational	referential	Representatives (tell people how things are)	Reference to non-linguistic word	Representational ('I've got something to tell you')

	poetic		aesthetics	imaginative ('let's pretend')
conative	conative	Commissives (commit myself to doing things)	performatives	Instrumental ('I want')
		Declarations (bring about changes through our utterances)		
		Directives (get others to do things)	Regulation of self and others	Regulatory ('Do as tell you')
	metalingual		Metalingual	

Figure 2: Functional categories of speech acts

- a. The first category, common to most schemes, recognizes that a speech serves to express the speaker's personal state of mind or attitude, for example, a child's cry, exclamations (ooch!), grunts, or sighs. Labov's studies provide ingeniously devised evidence in speech behavior for speaker's perception of his identity in the social structure and even his aspirations and assessment of a situation. In Robinson's analysis a speech act is said to mark the emotional state, personality, and social identity of the speaker. Wilkins identifies personal emotions (positive and negative) as one functional category.
- b. Another function of speech act is to bring the participants in contact or in relationship to each other. This function has been described by Halliday (1973:17) as *interactional* or as the 'me and you' function. It may therefore serve to mark role relationships or regulate encounters (Robinson). One important aspect of this function is simply to open up and maintain social contacts, the 'pfiatic communion'. Wilkin's category of emotional relations (greetings, sympathy, gratitude, flattery, and hostility) covers the same ground.
- c. The *referential* or *representational* function of speech figures in all the schemes. Even a child intuitively knows and can convey 'a message which has specific reference to the processes, persons, objects, abstractions, qualities, states and relations of the real world around him:' (Halliday 1973:16).
- d. Language is often used with the purpose of making the recipient do something (*instrumental use*), for example, requesting, commanding, urging, or in some other way of regulating his conduct. Instructing or teaching can be regarded as a type of communicative behavior intended to cause the addressee to do something (i.e., to learn).
- e. Following Austin (1962) Robinson (1972) has identified as *performatives* certain speech acts which in themselves fulfill the role of actions such as advising, warning, congratulating, cursing, or promising. These are categorized by Searle as declarations and commissives.

- f. The use of language for enquiry or questioning is treated as a separate category by Halliday and Robinson. Halliday refers to it as the heuristic function. Wilkins' category 'Rational Enquiry and Exposition' partly covers the same ground.
- g. The use of language for its own sake, *to please*, i.e., imaginatively and aesthetically, is recognized by some schemes. In Bishler's model this function is subsumed under the expressive category.
- h. Lastly, Jakobson and Robinson treat as a separate category the use of language to talk about (*the metalingual function*), i.e., explanations and comments about speech acts (for example, 'I repeat', 'I must emphasize', 'What does this word mean?').

Communicative Competence

A native speaker's language proficiency implies the ability to act as a speaker and listener in the diverse ways that the different categories we have outlined attempt to grasp. The intuitive mastery that the native speaker possesses to use and interpret language appropriately in the process of interaction and in relation to social context has been called by Hymes (1972) and others 'communicative competence', a concept which has in recent years been widely accepted in language pedagogy. In Hymes' it is a competence: *when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner* (Hymes 1972: 227).

On the other hand the complexity of the entire rule system is such that it might appear almost impossible for any anyone except a native speaker to acquire communicative competence. This leads to the conclusion that communicative competence of a second language learner must be conceived somewhat differently from that of a native speaker. It suggests, besides grammatical and sociolinguistic competence which are obviously restricted in a second language user, a third element, an additional skill which the second language user needs, that is grammatical competence is limited, i.e., to know how to be a 'foreigner'. This skill has been called by Canale and Swain 'strategic competence'. Naturally as the second language user's communicative competence increases in the other two respects this third element becomes less and less important.

4. The Sociology of Language

The first and second direction of sociolinguistics can be said to operate at the 'micro' level of language use and language behavior. The sociology of language operates at the 'macro' level (Fishman 1972). This direction of enquiry focuses on *speech communities and on languages as social institutions*. From this perspective sociolinguistics looks at countries, regions, cities, and so on, and relates social structures and social groups to languages and varieties of language used in the society.

The study of languages and literatures in schools and universities and even in more recent study of linguistics were largely founded on the position that language had attained in the major European nation states: a position of uniformity, standardization of use, and homogeneity throughout the society. Most modern schools of linguistic thought tend to look at a language as an internally coherent system of contrast and relations. They are not directly equipped to cross language boundaries, to relate one language to another or to deal with multilingualism.

The sociology of language has been the intellectual response to this new interpretation of the role of languages in society. Since the nineteenth century, linguists have studied regional differences within a speech community; dialectology has always been an important branch of linguistics; and for many years scholars have investigated the specialized languages of certain social groups, such as the slang of thieves and soldiers, craft jargons, and secret argots. But dialects and slangs tended to be regarded as linguistically interesting deviations from the language norm rather than as the socially significant range of normal linguistic diversity.

4.1. Varieties of language Situations

Around 1960 the new view of the role of languages in society attracted the attention of linguists, anthropologists, and sociologists. The sociolinguists and linguists in the sixties set about to define or redefine a number of basic concepts of the sociology of language. One such central term is *speech community*. Later on, this term might have been defined as a community that shares the same language. But in the sociology of language a speech community is redefined as a group of people (face – to – face group, gang, region, nation) who regularly communicate with each other (Gumperz 1968). It is therefore left open in this definition whether the group is large or small, and whether the medium of communication they use is one language or dialect, or several dialects, codes, or languages. The observation that some languages have developed a high (H) and a low (L) form of the same language has prompted Ferguson (1959) to adopt the term *diglossia* (from French *diglossie*). Examples of diglossia are classical Arabic and Egyptian in Arabic and Egypt or Standard German and Swiss German in Switzerland.

Within a speech community two or several languages (bilingualism or multilingualism) may be in use. Stewart (1962, 1968) distinguished typology languages, including dialects, into four sociohistorical attributes:

- a. *History (I)*, i.e., whether or not the language is the result of a process of development through use. What makes a language obviously historical is its association with some national or ethnic tradition.
- b. *Standardization (II)*, i.e.; whether or not there exists for the language a codified set of grammatical and lexical norms which are formally accepted and learnt by the languages users . . .
- c. *Vitality (III)*, i.e., whether or not the language has an existing community of native speakers . . .
- d. *Homogeneity (IV)* i.e., whether or not the language's basic lexicon and basic grammatical structure both derive from the same pre – stages of the language.

From these four characteristics Stewart has been able to define seven language types as the following:

A *standard* language (S) such as English or French spoken by educated native speakers, has all four attributes. A *classical* (C), such as Latin or Classical Arabic, has three but lacks the attribute of 'vitality'. A *vernacular*, for example, tribal languages of America or Africa, has three, but lacks the formal standardization of grammar and lexicon. *Creoles* and *Pidgin* languages are 'the result of the development of a secondary language for wider communication in . . . contact situations where grammatical and lexical material from different sources became fused' (Stewart 1962: 19 -). A pidgin is only used as a secondary language. If it becomes a native language it develops into creole. Esperanto is an example of an *artificial* language (A). *Marginal* languages (M) describe household languages or codes, developed among small groups. *Official* (o): The legally recognized use of a language, for example, use as the language of education and government. *Group* (g): The use of a language by the members of an ethnic or cultural group. *Wider Communication* (w): The use of a language for communication across language boundaries. Another term used for a language of wider communication is *lingua franca* (Sanmarin 1962). *Education* (e): The use of a language for educational purposes. *Literary* (l): The use of a language for literary or scholarly writing. *Religious* (r): The use of a language in connection with religious practice. *Technical* (t): The use of a language for technical and scientific communications.

4.2. Sociology and Social Psychology of Speech Communities

An important aspect of the complex sociology of speech communities is the *intellectual and emotional response of the members of the society to the languages and varieties in their social environment*. It is part of native speaker's communicative competence to be able to distinguish his first language from all other languages and to identify different language varieties. Social attitudes towards languages and speech communities, including one's own, and the language perceptions of members of speech communities have been studied by psychologists for several decades Lambert (1979, Gardner 1979, Adorno, *et al.* 1950). Their studies showed that *individuals have strong feelings about their own language or language variety and relate it to cognitively and affectively to other languages or other language varieties*.

4.3. Language Planning

Language Planning consists of organized efforts to find out solutions to language problems in a society (Fishman 1972: 186). It is therefore an application of sociolinguistic concepts and information to policy decisions involving languages. Language planning – like social, or educational planning – is a process of decision making based on 'fact – finding' the consideration of different plans of action, the making of decisions, and the implementation of these in specified ways' (Haugen 1966a : 52). Examples of language planning are: *a writing system for a hitherto unwritten language, introducing a spelling reform; the revival of a language; the choice and introduction of a language as a medium of wider communication or instruction; standardization of language usage; extension of the vocabulary in order to meet needs of modernization.*

Language planning is a means to arrive at more informed decisions about language in society. It comprises at least two main activities: *in the first place*, the planner can assist in making basic policy decisions on such questions such as to which language should be used for wider communication, which language should be used for instruction, etc. – in short, the fundamental decisions of language choice, language emphasis, and language tolerance.

From another point of view language planning is more directly linguistic. Assuming that the selection of languages is settled, planning in this *second sense* is concerned with the development or cultivation of the language itself: questions of standardization, determination of norms of pronunciations, establishment of reform of the orthography, extension of the vocabulary, and so on – in short, the tasks of shaping and refining the language as an effective means of communication. In this kind of language planning the skills of the linguist come into play; but different from linguistics, language planning at this stage is necessarily to a certain extent 'prescriptive' or 'normative'.

Whether language planning is conceived as planning the selection and determination of a language, or whether it is understood as development and cultivation of aspects of the particular language already in use, the planning process is likely to go through a necessary series of stages (Rubin 1971, 1973):

- a. *Fact – finding.* The planning must be based on a survey and review of the language situation for which the plan is developed.
- b. *The selection stage.* At this stage the planner will attempt to identify language goals and choices open to the society in question or its policy makers and suggest strategies for reaching these goals.
- c. *The development stage.* At this stage, the traditionally recognized forms of language planning are employed: the cultivation and development of language or languages that have been selected at the previous stage. Planning as development will focus on the preparation of an orthography, the making of a pronunciation guide, the preparation of technical vocabularies, and so on.
- d. *The implementation phase.* This selection of a language is not enough nor is the setting up of the orthography, lexical list, pronouncing dictionary, or grammatical guide. The planning decisions must eventually become part of the language behavior of the speech community. Defining the steps to take – information, dissemination, and instruction – constitute the fourth phase of the planning process.
- e. The final phase is one of *feedback and evaluation.* This aspect of planning can be regarded as concurrent with, as well as subsequent to, the other phases. Evaluation will relate each phase to goals and effects of a language policy. It will also represent the follow – up part of the implementation. In other words, planning becomes part of a cycle of activities which can be represented as follows:

*Fact – finding survey → language selection → cultivation and development → implementation
→ evaluation → revision, etc.*

5. Conclusion

From the explanation and description of the concepts of society for language pedagogy above, the social sciences can be said to offer a threefold contribution:

1. Sociology and anthropology provide the tools for the systematic study of societies and cultures which form the necessary contexts for a study of language.
2. Sociolinguistics provides concepts, mechanisms, and systematic information for a study of language in a social, cultural, and interpersonal matrix. Both these contributions can be said to have bearing on curriculum objectives and content.
3. the sociology of language suggest ways of looking at languages and language teaching in a sociological way and may lead to an interpretation of second language teaching and learning as one of society's ways of establishing cross-lingual and ethnic group contact.

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