

# Master of Arts (MA) Linguistics

MAL-14 Sociolinguistics

### SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES TAMIL NADU OPEN UNIVERSITY



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#### TAMIL NADU OPEN UNIVERSITY

(A State Open University Established by Government of Tamil Nadu, Recognized by UGC & DEB Member in Asian Association of Open Universities & Association of Commonwealth Universities)

No.577, Anna Salai, Saidapet, Chennai - 600 015. Tamil Nadu.

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Vice Chancellor

Date:10-02-2021

Message

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I wish you the best of luck in all of your future endeavours!

OPPO -

(K. PARTHASAR ATHY)



# Sociolinguistics (MAL-14)

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## School of Humanities Tamil Nadu Open University

577, Anna Salai, Saidapet, Chennai – 600 015.

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# Unit 1

# **Sociolinguistics: An Introduction**

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#### **OVERVIEW**

As a gateway to the whole Course on Sociolinguistics, in this Unit we will give you a broad glimpse of this branch of Linguistics by discussing various aspects relating to sociolinguistics such as language variation, the mutual influence of language and culture, the factors that affect the language use, etc. Later, as we proceed further in the Course, we will examine each of these aspects in detail in different Units.

Thus, we will begin this Unit by giving you the popular meaning of sociolinguistics and how different theorists/linguists view the field differently though there is a point of convergence. We will then spend reasonable time in explaining the concept of language variations and bring to the fore how language defines the linguistic behaviour of a group of people in a given society as well as how social structure influences language use. Subsequently, we will study two basic theories of language acquisition and language use which have influenced sociolinguistic studies: the theory of language and parole propounded by Ferdinand de Saussure and the theory of competence and performance of Noam Chomsky. We will then take up for discussion such sociolinguistic differences as geography, ethnicity, nationality, occupation, class, age group and gender that are necessary in the understanding of language use in society.

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing this Unit, you should be able to:

- State the meaning and differing perspectives of sociolinguistics.
- Identify the relationship between language and society.
- Explain langue and parole as well as competence and performance.
- Discuss sociolinguistics differences in terms of age, class, gender, etc.

#### 1.1 WHAT IS SOCIOLINGUISTICS?

Language is essentially a set of linguistic elements such as sounds, words, grammatical structures and so on. On the one hand, it is these linguistic elements, their status and their arrangements that language theorists such as Chomsky primarily concern themselves with. While, on the other hand, social theorists attempt to understand how societies are structured and how people manage to live together. They do so by analyzing such concepts as 'identity,' 'power,' 'class,' 'status,' 'solidarity,' 'accommodation,' 'face,' 'gender,' 'politeness,' etc.

A major concern of this Course is to examine the possible relationships between linguistic elements on the one hand and concepts such as 'power,' 'solidarity,' etc., on the other. You should note here that in doing so we are trying to relate two different kinds of entities in order to see what light they throw on each other. This is not an easy task: linguistic elements as well as social constructs are difficult to define. Is it easy, for example, to define exactly as to what linguistic elements such as sounds, syllables, words and sentences are? Or, can we define precisely what we understand by such social constructs as 'social class,' 'solidarity,' 'identity', etc.?

#### The language and society relationship

The difficulty of defining these notions arises primarily because languages and societies are constantly changing. However, there indeed are several possible relationships between language and society. Let us list some of these below:

1. **Influence of social structure on language**: Social structures very often influence linguistic structures and behaviours. For example, young children speak differently from older ones and children speak differently from mature adults. There are also ample studies which show that the varieties of language that speakers use reflect such matters as their regional, social or ethnic origin and possibly even their

gender. In addition, there are studies which show how particular ways of speaking, choices of words, rules for conversing, etc., are influenced by certain social requirements.

- 2. **Influence of linguistic structures on social structures**: Linguistic structures and behaviours influence social structures and the vice-versa. This is the reason why theorists such as Whorf, Bernstein and others argue that languages *per se* rather than speakers of these languages can be sexist.
- 3. **Bi-directional influence**: Language and society do influence each other. In other words, speech behaviour and social behaviour are in a state of constant interaction, and sociolinguists with Marxist orientation consider the material living condition, i.e., the class dimension, an important factor in this interaction.

But, there are linguists who see no relationship between linguistic and social structures. According to them, linguistic and social structures are independent of each other. They argue that although there might be some relationship between the two, present attempts to characterize it are essentially premature, given what we know about both language and society. One of the proponents of this theory is the eminent American linguist Noam Chomsky. His attempt is to develop an *asocial* linguistics as a preliminary to any other kind of linguistics.

Linguistic and social structures are independent of each other. A variant of this possibility would be to say that, although there might be some such relationship, present attempts to characterize it are essentially premature, given what we know about both language and society. Actually, this variant view appears to be the one that the eminent linguist, Chomsky himself holds. He prefers to develop an *asocial* linguistics as a preliminary to any other kind of linguistics, and such an asocial approach being, in his view, logically prior.

However, there is no gainsaying the fact that linguistic structure and social structure influence each other and therefore we should be prepared to look

into the various aspects of the possible relationships between language and society. Looked at from this viewpoint, correlational studies form a significant part of sociolinguistic work. John J. Gumperz (1971) has observed that sociolinguistics is an attempt to find correlations between social structure and linguistic structure and to observe any changes that occur. Jack Chambers (2002) is even more direct when he says that sociolinguistics is the study of the social uses of language, and the most productive studies on sociolinguistic research have emanated from determining the social evaluation of linguistic variants.

That said, we should also note that a correlation shows only a relationship between two variables and does not show ultimate causation. For example, to find that X and Y are related is not necessarily to discover that X causes Y, and similarly Y causes X, because it is also quite possible that some third factor, Z, may cause both X and Y (or even that some far more subtle combination of factors is involved). What we are trying to imply here is that we must always exercise caution, when we attempt to draw conclusions from such relationships between linguistic and social structures.

#### Beyond the language and society relationship

A worthwhile sociolinguistics cannot restrict itself to a simple mixing of linguistics and sociology which takes concepts and findings from the two disciplines and attempts to relate them in simple ways. A mechanical amalgamation of standard linguistics and standard sociology is not sufficient. By merely adding a *speechless sociology* to a *sociology-free linguistics* we cannot expect to understand the real relationship between language and society.

What this suggests is that we must discover specific points of connection between language and society and relate them within theories that throw light on how linguistic and social structures interact. Generally, a sociolinguist aims at moving towards a theory which provides a motivated account of the way language is used in a community and the choices people make when they use language. For example, when we observe how varied language use is, we must search for the causes. When we observe language variability, we seek its corresponding social correlates: What is the purpose of the variation? How is it evaluated in the community? What do its variants symbolize?

As sociolinguistics is the study of language variation, some theorists consider these questions important. However, some others do not hold this view. They believe that these studies do not provide satisfactory explanations for linguistic behaviour because of inadequacies with social theory as well as failure to appreciate the difficulties in using social concepts. What assumes more importance to these theorists are such matters as the production and reproduction of linguistic norms by institutions and socializing practices; how these norms are apprehended, accepted, resisted and subverted by individual actors and what their relation is to the construction of identity.

In the main, sociolinguistics is about asking important questions concerning the relationship of language to society.

#### 1.1.1 Different views

Some experts in the field introduce a distinction between *sociolinguistics* (or *micro-sociolinguistics*) and the *sociology of language* (or *macro-sociolinguistics*). What do we mean by these terms?

- Sociolinguistics: Sociolinguistics is seen as concerning with investigating the relationships between language and society with the goal being a better understanding of the structure of language and of how languages function in communication.
- **Sociology of language**: Sociology of language is seen as trying to discover how social structures can be better understood through the

study of language, e.g., how certain linguistic features serve to characterize particular social arrangements.

Richard Hudson (1996) describes sociolinguistics as the study of language in relation to society, whereas the sociology of language is the study of society in relation to language. In other words, in sociolinguistics we study language and society in order to find out as much as we can about what kind of thing language is, and in the sociology of language we reverse the direction of our interest. That is to say, micro-sociolinguistics (sociolinguistics) investigates how the social structure influences the way people talk and how language varieties and patterns of use correlate with social attributes such as class, sex and age. Macro-sociolinguistics (sociology of language), on the other hand, studies what societies do with their languages. It deals with the attitudes and attachments that account for the functional distribution of speech forms in society, language shift, maintenance, and replacement, the delimitation and interaction of speech communities.

To reiterate, both sociolinguistics and the sociology of language require a systematic study of language and society, if they are to be successful. Moreover, a sociolinguistics that deliberately refrains from drawing conclusions about society seems to be unnecessarily restrictive, just as much as a sociology of language that deliberately ignores discoveries about language made in the course of sociological research. So, while it is possible to do either kind of work to the exclusion of the other, we are concerned with looking at both kinds.

Peter Trudgill (1978) finds a clear distinction between the two, unlike Ronald Wardhaugh (2006) who argues that there is no sharp demarcation between the two. However, Trudgill points out that while everybody would agree that sociolinguistics has *something* to do with language and society, it is clearly also not concerned with everything that could be considered language and society. The problem, therefore, lies in the drawing of the line between *language and society* and *sociolinguistics*. For example,

Trudgill argues that certain types of language studies are almost entirely sociological in their objectives and seem to fall outside even the sociology of language, e.g., ethno-methodological studies.

According to Trudgill, certain kinds of work combine insights from sociology and linguistics, e.g., studies about the structure of discourse and conversation; speech acts; studies in the ethnography of speaking; investigations of such matters as kinship systems; studies in the sociology of language such as bilingualism, code-switching and diglossia, and certain practical concerns such as various aspects of teaching and language behaviour in classrooms. Yet another category of studies which, according to Trudgill, show a concern for both linguistic and social matters relate to empirical work on language as it is spoken in its social context, e.g., studies of variation and linguistic change.

There is a growing amount of work within a broadly defined sociolinguistics that takes an 'interventionist' approach with a view to revealing how language is used and abused in the exercise of power and the suppression of human rights (Widdowson, 1998). Two of its main exponents are van Dijk (1993) and Fairclough (1995/2001).

Teun Adrianus van Dijk champions an approach called 'critical discourse analysis' (CDA). This work focuses on:

- how language is used to exercise and preserve power and privilege in society;
- how it buttresses social institutions, and
- how even those who suffer, as a consequence, fail to realize how many things that appear to be 'natural' and 'normal' are not at all so.

The claim is that politics, medicine, religion, education, law, race, gender, and academia can only be understood for what they really are within the framework of critical discourse analysis: as systems that maintain an

unequal distribution of wealth, income, status, group membership, education, and so on.

Norman Fairclough (2001) expresses what he sees as the failure of sociolinguistics to deal with matters such as the following:

Sociolinguistics is strong on "what?" questions (what are the facts of variation?) but weak on "why?" and "how?" questions (why are the facts as they are?; how – in terms of the development of social relationships of power – was the existing sociolinguistic order brought into being?; how is it sustained?; and how might it be changed to the advantage of those who are dominated by it?).

#### 1.1.2 Methodological concerns

Sociolinguistics should encompass everything from considering 'who speaks, or writes, what language, or what language variety, to whom and when and to what end, etc. That is, sociolinguistics must address a wide variety of concerns right from the social distribution of linguistic items to considering how a particular linguistic variable relates to the formulation of a specific grammatical rule in a particular language or dialect as well as to the processes through which languages change. Whatever sociolinguistics is, it must be oriented towards both data and theory. In other words, any conclusions we arrive at must be solidly based on evidence.

Above all, our research must be motivated by questions that can be answered in an approved scientific way. Data collected for the sake of collecting data are of little interest, since without some kind of focus – that is, without some kind of non-trivial motive for collection – they can tell us little or nothing. For instance, a set of random observations about how a few people use language cannot lead us to any useful generalizations about behaviour, either linguistic or social (though at times generalizations are

not possible). We should not be content with 'butterfly collecting'. In other words, no matter how beautiful the specimens are, they may not provide the required data or information unless questions are phrased in such a manner as to allow some kind of empirical testing. Those who seek to investigate the possible relationships between language and society must have a two-fold concern: they must ask good questions, and they must find the right kinds of data that bear on those questions.

Since sociolinguistics is an empirical science, it must be founded on an adequate database. That database must be drawn from a wide variety of sources. These include censuses, documents, surveys, and interviews. Some data require the investigator to observe 'naturally occurring' linguistic events, e.g., conversations; others require the use of various elicitation techniques to gain access to the data we require and different varieties of experimental manipulation. Some kinds of data require various statistical procedures, particularly when we wish to make statements about the typical behaviour of a group, e.g., a social class; other kinds seem best treated through such devices as graphing, scaling, and categorizing in non-statistical ways, as in dialect geography or the study of kinship systems.

A bona fide empirical science sets stringent demands so far as data collecting and analysis are concerned, demands involving sampling techniques, error estimation, and the confidence level, or the *level of significance* with which certain statements can be made, particularly when arguments are based on numbers, e.g., averages, percentages, or proportions. Sociolinguists, generally, try to meet these statistical demands when they are required. However, many of the conclusions we can draw from sociolinguistic studies are of a non-statistical nature and leave no element of doubt.

Allan Bell (1976), drawing extensively on the work of William Labov, suggests the following eight principles in the study of language variation:

- 1. **The cumulative principle**: The more that we know about language, the more we can find out about it, and we should not be surprised if our search for new knowledge takes us into new areas of study and into areas in which scholars from other disciplines are already working.
- 2. **The uniformation principle**: The linguistic processes which we observe to be taking place around us are the same as those which have operated in the past, so that there can be no clean break between *synchronic* (i.e., descriptive and contemporary) matters and *diachronic* (i.e., historical) ones.
- 3. The principle of convergence: The value of new data for confirming or interpreting old findings is directly proportional to the differences in the ways in which the new data are gathered; particularly useful are linguistic data gathered through procedures needed in other areas of scientific investigation.
- 4. The principle of subordinate shift: When speakers of a non-standard (or subordinate) variety of language, e.g., a dialect, are asked direct questions about that variety, their responses will shift in an irregular way either towards or away from the standard variety, e.g., the standard language, and thereby enabling investigators to collect valuable evidence concerning such matters as varieties, norms, and change.
- 5. **The principle of style-shifting**: There are no 'single-style' speakers of a language, because each individual controls and uses a variety of linguistic styles and no one speaks in exactly the same way in all circumstances.
- 6. **The principle of attention**: 'Styles' of speech can be ordered along a single dimension measured by the amount of attention speakers are giving to their speech, so that the more 'aware' they are of what they are saying, the more 'formal' the style will be.
- 7. **The vernacular principle**: The style which is most regular in its structure and in its relation to the history of the language is the vernacular, that relaxed, spoken style in which the least conscious attention is being paid to speech.

8. **The principle of formality**: Any systematic observation of speech defines a context in which some conscious attention will be paid to that speech, so that it will be difficult, without great ingenuity, to observe the genuine 'vernacular.'

The last principle accounts for what Labov has called the 'observer's paradox.' He points out that the aim of linguistic research is to find out how people talk when they are not being systematically observed, but the data are available only through systematic observation. Somehow, speakers must have their attention diverted away from the fact that they are being observed so that the vernacular can emerge. This can happen when speakers become emotional. Labov found that a question like 'Have you been in a situation where you were in serious danger of being killed?' nearly always produces a shift of style away from careful speech towards the vernacular, thus providing the linguist with the kinds of data being sought.

To sum up, sociolinguistics is considered a branch of linguistics which examines and analyses the individual and social variation of language. More often than not, regional variation of language gives out the information about the origin of the language user and similarly social variation informs us about the roles performed by a language user within a society/community. Sociolinguistics, in essence, reveals the relationship between language use and the social basis for such use. However, different views on the filed are abound. In this context, consider the following descriptions of sociolinguistics:

- The study of language in social contexts.
- The study of social and cultural effects on language.
- The study of language in relation to its socio-cultural context.
- The study of the relationship between language and society, of language variation and of attitudes about language.
- The study of the relationship between language and social factors such as class, ethnicity, age and sex.

- A branch of anthropological linguistics that studies how language and culture are related and how language is used in different social contexts.
- The study of the sociological factors involved in the use of language, including gender, race, class, etc.
- The study of the effect of any and all aspects of society, including cultural norms, expectations, and context on the way language is used.
- The study of stylistic and social variation of language.

Though the focus of the above descriptions appears to vary, there indeed is a common thread that binds them all together, i.e., the social study of language is called sociolinguistics. That is, sociolinguistics is a branch of linguistics that binds sociology with linguistics together. You may like to note at this juncture that sociolinguistics differs from sociology of language. While the focus of sociolinguistics is the effect of the society on the language, the focus of the latter is on the effect of the languages on the society.

Every society has linguistic codes acceptable for communication and interaction. Sociolinguistics show how groups in a given society are separated by certain social variables like ethnicity, religion, status, gender, level of education, age, etc., and how adherence to these variables is used to categorize individuals in social class or socio-economic classes. The factors that influence the way people use the language include the following:

1. Social Class: This refers to the status of the speaker in the society, measured by the level of education, parental background, profession/occupation and their effect on syntax and lexis used by the speaker. An important factor influencing the way of formulating sentences, according to sociolinguists, is the social class of the speakers. Thus, there has been a division of social classes proposed in order to make the description accurate. Two main groups of language users, mainly those performing non-manual work and those with more

- years of education are the 'middle class', while those who perform some kind of manual work are 'working class'.
- 2. **Social Context:** This stands for the *register* (or jargon) of the language used depending on changing situations, e.g., formal language in formal meetings and informal usage during meetings with friends. It is notable that people are acutely aware of the differences in speech patterns that mark their social class and are often able to adjust their style to the interlocutor. The process of adapting own speech to reduce social distance is called *convergence*. On the other hand, when people want to emphasize the social distance, they make use of the process called *divergence*, purposefully using idiosyncratic forms.
- 3. **Geographical Origins**: This refers to the minor differences in pronunciation that help us identify the geographical regions the speakers may belong to. Sociolinguistics investigates the way in which language changes, depending on the region of the country it is used in. To describe a variety of language that differs in grammar, lexis and pronunciation from others, the term *dialect* is used. Moreover, each member of community has a unique way of speaking due to the life experience, education, age and aspiration. An individual personal variation of language use is called an *idiolect*.
- 4. Ethnicity: This shows the differences between the use of a given language by its native speakers and other ethnic groups. There are numerous factors influencing idiolect, including *jargon* and *slang*. Jargon is specific technical vocabulary associated with a particular field of interest, or topic. For example, words such as convergence, dialect and social class are sociolinguistic jargon. Whereas slang is a type of language used most frequently by people from outside of high-status groups, characterized by the use of unusual words and phrases instead of conventional forms. For example, a sociolinguist might determine, through the study of social attitudes, that a particular expression would not be considered appropriate language use in a business or professional setting; she or he might also study the grammar, phonetics, vocabulary, and other aspects of this *sociolect*, much as a dialectologist would study the same for a regional dialect.

- 5. **Nationality**: This is clearly visible in the case of the English language: British English differs from American English, or Canadian English or Australian English; Caribbean English differs from Indian English, etc. 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.
- 6. **Gender**: This refers to the differences in patterns of language use between men and women, such as quantity of speech, intonation patterns.
- 7. **Age:** This refers to the influence of age of the speaker on the use of vocabulary and grammar complexity.

#### What is a language?

Given the complexities involved in the use of language, Ferdinand de Saussure wondered, "But what does a language look like, what is it like at a particular moment?", during the series of lectures he gave at the University of Geneva during the early 1900s. A compilation of his lectures gave rise into the *Course in General Linguistics* in 1916, after his death. And, that became the focal point for linguistics in the 20th Century. The strand of linguistics that his lectures resulted in the emergence of 'structuralism' and those who follow it are referred to as structuralists. The fundamental question posed in structuralism is that of the characteristics of the system. What are the elements of a structure (whatever it may be), and what are the relations between the elements? Saussure himself gave a complex answer in which the focus was on the *sign*, and on the all-encompassing entity in which signs exist, language as such, or what Saussure called *langue*.

The sign is a device for permitting *form* to express *meaning* because it is a means for allowing one element to be the form (the *signifier*) through which another element, the meaning (the *signified*) finds its realisation; its expression. A *rose* can be the form for the expression of the meaning 'love'.

A connection is made between an element in the system of language, and an element in the system of culturally salient values.

Langue, the system of a particular language, is the expression of a social force both by making the arbitrary connection and in sustaining it in convention. The individual may make use of the system, in *parole*; but the individual cannot change the system, the language. The relation of form and meaning is motivated, not arbitrary, and, at the same time, it is sustained by convention in particular ways. However, the significant point here is that Saussure's views on the characteristics of systems, structure, signs, on *langue* and *parole*, shaped the development of mainstream and non-mainstream linguistics in the 20th Century.

In the mainstream, these views allowed emphasis to be placed on relations within the system rather than on reference; on structure rather than on function; on arbitrariness, thus eliminating the force of individual agency, whether from the individual sign or from the system of signs, the langue; and to treat langue as a phenomenon not directly connected to the social.

#### LEARNING ACTIVITY 1.1

State the factors that influence the language use.

#### Note:

- a) Write your answer in the space given below.
- b) Check the answer with your academic counsellor.

# 1.2 SOCIOLINGUISTICS AND LANGUAGE VARIATION

In this Section, we will study language varieties as they pertain to sociolinguistics. In every aspect of human endeavour, there are a variety of languages that are applied in that setting. Every social situation has a linguistic bias or cliché appropriate for it. A language can be classified into three varieties, i.e., the sign, the written and the spoken. Each of these varieties has various ways by which it is used or applied. Whenever a spoken variety is written down, for example, it is often distinguished because of the colloquial qualities inherent. Taking this into account, we will study the difference between the written and the spoken varieties here and the notion of sociolinguistic variation in language use in a society.

Generally, language is seen as a singly, uniform entity. General descriptions of languages focusing on pronunciation, or grammar, usually provide information about the standard variety of a given language. The standard language is what learners study as part of their curriculum. But, then, an analysis of a language will show that in reality this is not so. In other words, even within one language-community (e.g., country or state), significant differences can be seen. These differences become a subject for linguistic investigations.

One of the most easily noticeable features that characterize some regional feature of a language is most certainly *accent*. Although, it is generally believed that some people speak with an accent and others do not, this is not true. Every language speaker utters words with some kind of accent which can tell the listeners where the speaker is from. Accent is frequently confused with the term *dialect* which denotes aspects of pronunciation together with words and syntax slightly different from the standard variety. Although various dialects of one language hold grammar rules and vocabulary characteristic to them, speakers of different dialects of one language understand each other without major difficulties.

Moreover, one language user can speak two different dialects, or varieties of one language. In countries like China or Malta, there are distinct forms of language used on everyday basis and on special occasions. Such a linguistic situation, when one variety of language is considered more prestigious and the other one more vernacular, but both are in, use depending on situation, is called *diglossia*.

Apart from regional variations of a language within the boundaries of a country or speech community, there are other factors influencing language change. In certain areas of the world, English has been used as a lexifier, that is, a language which is a source of words, for varieties of language called *pidgin*. A pidgin, or a contact language, is a mixture of two other languages, created usually because of trading purposes between peoples who do not share a common means of communication. English-based pidgins are used in India, Cameroon, in the Caribbean and Nigeria, for example. Such varieties of language often have limited vocabulary, poorly developed grammar and are used only when other types of communication are impossible.

When a pidgin begins to be used by a larger number of people, its vocabulary and grammar expand, and it starts to be used in a wider context. As it is developed as a contact language, pidgin does not have any native speakers, yet if it is used on a wider scale, children of people using it might acquire it as their mother tongue. When such a language starts to be used by a second generation of speakers, it is called a *creole*. It is the next stage of development for pidgin and it is characterized by different grammatical features such as avoidance of passive voice, lack of case distinction in pronouns, and different word order. Some English-based creoles include Caribbean Creole, Hawaiian Creole and Australian Creoles, etc. You can hear French-based creole in Mauritius.

As the process of the development of a pidgin into a creole is called creolisation, there is also a process of de-creolisation, which stimulates further change of a language. When people using a creole have some contact with the standard language, they tend to shift from one form to the other, thus often changing the structures of creole to make it resemble the standard version, which is perceived as having a higher social prestige.

#### 1.2.1 Notion of sociolinguistic variation

A variety of a language is a form that differs from other forms of the language systematically and coherently. Variety is a wider concept than style of prose or style of language. Some writers in sociolinguistics use the term *lect*, apparently a back-formation from specific terms such as dialect and idiolect. Varieties such as dialects, idiolects and sociolects can be distinguished, not only by their vocabulary, but also by differences in grammar, phonology and prosody. For instance, the tonal word accents of Scandinavian languages have differing realizations in many dialects.

Foreign words in different sociolects vary in their degree of adaptation to the basic phonology of the language. Certain professional *registers* such as legalese show a variation in grammar from the standard language. For instance, English journalists or lawyers often use grammatical moods such as subjunctive mood or conditional mood, which are no longer used frequently by other speakers. Many registers or jargons are simply a specialized set of terms. It is a matter of debate as to whether *slang* and *argot* are to be included in the concept of variety or of style. Colloquialisms and idiomatic expressions are usually understood as limited to variation of lexicon, and hence of style.

The concept of language varieties in general and language registers in particular can be of great help in translating as well as in evaluating translations. Since the concept of a 'whole language' is so broad and, therefore, rather loose, it may not be useful for many linguistic purposes – whether descriptive or comparative. In other words, the concept of language as a whole unit is theoretically lacking in accuracy and pragmatically rather useless. Consequently, the need arises for a scientific classification of sub-language or varieties within the total range of one language.

These varieties, or sub-languages, may be classified in more than one way. Thus, as mentioned above, idiolects, dialects, registers, styles and modes can be seen as varieties of any living language (Pit Coder, 1973). Quirk (1972) proposes region, education, subject matter, media and attitude as possible bases of language variety classification of English in particular. He recognizes dialects as varieties distinguished according to geographical dispersion, and standard and sub-standard English as varieties within different ranges of education and social position.

Language registers are recognized as varieties classified according to different subject matters. We acknowledge varieties distinguished according to attitude, which are called 'styles', and varieties due to interference, which arise when a foreign speaker imposes a grammatical usage of his native tongue upon the language, which he is using. For example, a Frenchman might say "I am here since Friday." This is lexically English, but grammatically French. Another way of classifying language varieties is in accordance with the user or the use of language. Thus, in the first category, we may list social dialects, geographical dialects and idiolects, whereas the second category includes language registers.

The total range of a language may be described in terms of its grammatical, phonological, and, sometimes, even graphological systems. Similarly, the language varieties of any given language have certain linguistic features in common. These common features of all the varieties of one language constitute the common core of that language. Apart from this common core of the language concerned, there are other lexical, grammatical and stylistic features of each individual language variety, and so these could serve as formal linguistic as well as stylistic markers of the language variety in question. It may be worth noting in this respect that these variety markers may exist on any level: phonetic, syntactical, stylistic and, above all, lexical.

#### LEARNING ACTIVITY 1.2

State as to whether we could use region, education, subject matter and media as parameters for sociolinguistic investigation.

#### Note:

- a) Write your answer in the space given below.
- b) Check the answer with your academic counsellor.

#### 1.2.2 Spoken and Written Varieties

There are two forms of language – the spoken and the written – within standard (literary) language. This differentiation is predetermined by two distinct factors, namely, the actual situation in which the language is being used and the aim of communication. The situation in which the spoken form of language is used and in which it develops presupposes the presence of the interlocutor, whereas, the written variety presupposes the absence of the interlocutor. The spoken language has a considerable advantage over the written because of such factors as human voice (voice modulation) all kinds of gestures (in face-to-face contexts), etc., which may provide additional information about the message being conveyed.

The written language has to seek means to compensate for what it lacks. This is the reason why the written language is more carefully organized and more explanatory. The spoken language is spontaneous and momentary, and vanishes (if not recorded) after having fulfilled its purpose, which is to communicate the thought, no matter how trivial or important. That is, the idea remains but the language disappears. But the written language is able to live a longer period of time along with the idea it expresses.

In addition, while the spoken language cannot be detached from its user, the written language can be detached and objectively looked at. The writer has an opportunity to correct and improve what has been put on paper. The written language bears a greater volume of responsibility than its spoken counterpart. The spoken language differs from the written language phonetically, morphologically, lexically and syntactically. The spoken language widely uses intensifying words. These are interjections and words with strong emotive meaning, as oaths, swear-words and adjectives, etc.

The most striking difference between the spoken and the written language is in the vocabulary used. There are words and phrases typically colloquial, on the one hand, and typically bookish, on the other hand. If colloquial words and phrases find their way into the written language, they immediately produce a marked stylistic effect and can be used for the speech characterization.

The choice of colloquial vocabulary falls into the following groups or varieties of choice, depending on the user's intent, social situation and immediate need:

- Common colloquial words: Slang is the most extended and vastly developed sub-group of non-standard colloquial layer of the vocabulary of a given type of language. Besides separate words, it includes also highly figurative phraseology. Slang occurs mainly in dialogue, and serves to create speech characteristics of personages).
- 2. Professional and social jargons: A jargon is a special type of

vocabulary in a given language. They are used in emotive prose to depict the natural speech of a character within the framework of such device as speech-characterization. They can show vocation, education, breeding, environment and even the psychology of a personage. Slang, contrary to jargon, needs no translation, jargon is used to conceal or disguise something.

- 3. **Vulgarisms:** Vulgarism is a term in ordinary people's language. It is a word or phrase from the language spoken by people generally, as contrasted with a more formal or refined usage of such language. Vulgarisms are divided into *expletives* and *swear-words*, used as general exclamations and obscene words. They are emotionally and strongly charged and can be used for speech-characterization.
- 4. **Dialectal words:** Dialectal words are special word forms that indicate the linguistic origin of the speaker. They are introduced into the speech of personages to indicate their region. The number of dialectal words and their frequency indicate the educational and cultural level of the speaker.

The essential difference between the two forms of language is evidently reflected in the syntactical structure. The syntactical peculiarities of the spoken language are omission of the part of utterance easily supplied by the situation in which the communication takes place (*Who you with? Tell you what?*). There is a strong tendency to use the direct word-order in questions or omit auxiliary verb, leaving it to the intonation to indicate the grammatical meaning (*He knew she was dead?*) unfinished sentences (*If I were you...*). Consider also the following typical features in the context of spoken/written language:

- a) Usage of a construction with two subjects (a tautological subject) (Helen, she was there.)
- b) Absence of connecting words (Came home late. Had a cup of tea. Went to bed soon after that.)
- c) Syntactical structures, expressing definite emotions, which can be understood only through a proper intonation design (*Isn't she cute!*

- Don't you tell me that! It's a lie!)
- d) The written language is characterized by the exact nature of the utterance (the abundance of all kinds of connecting words) the bookish "space-wasters" (despite the fact; arrive at a decision)
- e) The use of complicated sentence-units (long periods are more frequent than short utterances)
- f) An essential property of the written variety of language is coherence and logical unity, backed up by purely linguistic means.

#### 1.2.3 Society and Language Determinants

The speaker/writer makes complex sets of choices which lead to the realizations of the meaning in an actual structure. The systems are grouped into three broad functions which correspond to the tasks that any communicational system is asked to perform, and these are (Halliday, 1973):

- **Ideational function**: Saying something about the state of events in the world.
- **Interpersonal function**: Saying something about the state of the social relations between those who are interacting by means of the communicational system.
- **Textual function**: Saying something about the organization of the structure as a message.

Speakers choose simultaneously from options in each of these functions. For example, one might choose, within the *ideational function*, to have a clause-type which highlights agency (protesters shouting slogans); within the *interpersonal component* of the grammar, one might choose a statement so that the speaker has the role of someone who gives information (rather than ask a question or give a command) which would make it acquire different social relation between the people interacting and within the *textual component*, one might choose to highlight the agents of the action – *it was the protesters who shouted solgans*. The role of the

speaker here is very different from that in the correlational view. Here, they are active in selecting from the range of options available to them in response to the social contingencies in which they find themselves.

The choices selected above indicate the result of the speaker's assessment of the environment in which the speaker made the choice. Instead of 'protesters shouted slogans' we could have had 'ten cars burned in riots'; instead of a statement we could have had the questions: 'was it ten cars that were burned?'; 'did the rioters burn ten cars? and instead of highlighting the agents, we could have had 'some loss of property in demonstrations'. If the speaker's actions in choosing the options are prompted by their assessment of the social situation in which they find themselves, then we can, in principle at least, track back from the texts which have been produced to uncover the choices that have been made and why.

In every society, there are factors that determine language use. The determinants of language use in a society are the factors that determine acceptable linguistic forms in a given society. The language in use in some situations is not appropriate in some others. Since language does not occur in a vacuum, it is made possible through the basic requirements in a given society. Apart from the general societal requirements, there is also language use required in certain situations of professional touch. In certain situations requiring professional touch or vocational appeal, there are linguistic requirements for such situations. For instance, in a school environment, it is expected that the teacher should be careful in his/her language use since they have learners all around them and they may learn all that they say/do. In other words, if there is any linguistic aberration made by the teachers, there is every possibility that students copy it.

Social life, including language use, is governed by certain norms. The most basic of these norms are acquired in our early childhood through socialization. In the case of language norms, this means that the first language norms adopted are the ones of everyday spoken language.

Compared to the prescriptive norms of the standardized language, these un-codified norms are perhaps less conscious, yet more natural, in every sense of the word. These norms also historically precede the norms of the standard language. Furthermore, in communities without a written language, these are the only norms available. Labov (1972) stressed the importance of these naturally occurring norms for linguistic description. He both encourages to take the norms of the vernacular as the basis of grammatical description as well as to discuss more thoroughly the nature of language norms.

As the norms are inherently social, these assume importance in the sociolinguistic context. Sociolinguists believe that language occurs in social contexts and norms. As an approach that studies everyday spoken language in its social context, sociolinguistics provides a fruitful starting point for these considerations. This leads us to ask the question as to what kinds of situations and norms determine the theoretical basis of variation studies and, more particularly, what is the role of spoken language norms in these dimensions?

#### LEARNING ACTIVITY 1.3

Explain Halliday's ideational, interpersonal and textual paradigms to language use in society.

#### Note:

- a) Write your answer in the space given below.
- b) Check the answer with your academic counsellor.

# 1.3 CONTRIBUTION OF SAUSSURE AND CHOMSKY

In this Section, we will discuss two significant watershed moments in the study of language. During the early 1900s, Ferdinand de Saussure introduced the concepts of langue and parole which squarely questioned the conventional treatment of language analysis. Later, in the 1950s, Noam Chomsky brought out the notions of linguistic competence and performance which changed the way language was analysed. Though these happened in two difference continents and at different time periods, there indeed are points of convergence and divergence. In Sub-sections, 1.3.1 to 1.3.3, we shall discuss these aspects, respectively.

### 1.3.1 Saussure: Langue and parole

Traditionally, language has been seen as prescriptive, whereby language users accept the structure and usage as it is. However, the views of Ferdinand de Saussure as reflected in the *Course in General Linguistics* (1916) marked a significant milestone in the study of the human language. This led to the scientific analysis of the human utterance, which is a far cry from the 19<sup>th</sup> century popular organicist view of language as a natural organism, which, without being determinable by the will of man, grows and evolves in accordance with fixed laws. Saussure defined language as a social product, the social side of speech being beyond the control of the speaker. Saussure recognized the concept of 'langue' (language) and 'parole' (speech) in human language. Note, however, that *langue* and *parole* are more than just 'language' and 'speech', respectively, although this is a useful, quick way of remembering them.

Referring to language as "a system of signs that express ideas," Saussure suggests that it may be divided into two components: *langue* (an abstract system of language that is internalised by a given speech community) and *parole* (the individual acts of speech and the "putting into practice of

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language"). While speech (parole) is heterogeneous, i.e., composed of unrelated or differing parts or elements, language (langue) is homogeneous, i.e., composed of the union of meanings and 'sound images' in which both parts are psychological. As langue seems to be relatively more systematic giving scope for a scientific analysis, Saussure's focus was on it. Based on the Greek word 'semîon' (meaning 'sign'), Saussure calls this systematic study as semiology i.e., a science that studies the life of signs within society. Let us explain it further.

Langue is the whole system of language that precedes and makes speech possible. A sign is a basic unit of *langue*. By learning a language, we master the system of grammar, spelling, syntax and punctuation. These are all elements of langue. As a system, it has a large number of elements whereby meaning is assumed in the arrangements of its elements and the consequent relationships between these arranged elements.

Parole is the concrete use of the language, the actual utterances. It is an external manifestation of langue or the usage of the system, and, therefore, is not the system. By defining langue and parole, Saussure differentiates between language and how it is used, and thus enabling these two very different things to be studied as separate entities. As a structuralist, Saussure seemed to have been more interested in langue than parole. It was the system by which meaning could be assumed that was of interest rather than individual instances of its use.

In Saussure's view, *langue* represents a fund accumulated by the members of the community through the practice of speech, a grammatical system existing potentially in every brain, or more exactly, in the brains of a group of individuals; for the language is never complete in any single individual, but exists perfectly only in the collectivity of the individuals. Note that this definition avoids aligning *langue* with any particular definition of a language or a dialect. And, the expression "collectivity" remains undefined.

This distinction between langue and parole has been important, not only

for linguistics but for other disciplines as well, where it can be rendered as a distinction between institution and event or between the underlying system which makes possible various types of behaviour and actual instances of such behaviour.

However, these concepts have generated a lot of controversies among scholars. Noam Chomsky, the eminent American Linguist, gave his own version, but he has a slight shift from those of Saussure. Chomkey's *Syntactic Structures* (1957) initiated what many view as a scientific revolution in Linguistics. Chomsky sought a theory that would account for both linguistic structure and for the creativity of language – the fact that we can create entirely original sentences and understand sentences never before uttered. He proposed that all people have an innate ability to acquire language. The task of the Linguist, then, is to describe this universal human ability, known as *language competence*, with a grammar from which the grammars of all languages could be derived. The linguist would develop this grammar by looking at the rules children use in hearing and speaking their first language.

He termed the resulting model, or grammar, a *transformational-generative grammar*, referring to the transformations (or rules) that generate (or yield) sentences in the language. Certain rules, Chomsky asserted, are shared by all languages and form part of a universal grammar, while others are language specific and associated with particular speech communities. Since the 1960s, much of the development in the field of linguistics has been a reaction to or against Chomsky's theories.

At the end of the 20th century, Linguists used the term *grammar* primarily to refer to a subconscious linguistic system that enables people to produce and comprehend an unlimited number of utterances. Grammar, thus, accounts for our linguistic competence. Observations about the actual language we use, or language performance, are used to theorize about this invisible mechanism known as grammar.

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The orientation towards the scientific study of language led by Chomsky has had an impact on non-generative linguists as well. Comparative and historically oriented linguists are looking for the various ways linguistic universals show up in individual languages. Psycholinguists, interested in language acquisition, are investigating the notion that an ideal speaker-hearer is the origin of the acquisition process.

At this point, let us also touch upon the views of Mikhail Bakhtin (1929), a Marxist in orientation. He criticised the splitting of *langue* and *parole* as separating individuals and society where it matters most, at the point of production. He developed a 'dialogic' theory of utterances, where language is understood in terms of how it orients the speaker/writer to the listener/reader. Words are subject to negotiation, contest and struggle. Language is strongly affected by social context. Modification of *langue* at the point of *parole* is used to create assumed meaning, either where the speaker has limited grasp of language or where deliberate distortion is used.

# LEARNING ACTIVITY 1.4

Explain the contributions of Ferdinand de Saussure to modern linguistics.

#### Note:

- a) Write your answer in the space given below.
- b) Check the answer with your academic counsellor.

### 1.3.2 Chomsky: competence and performance

Traditional grammars that theoretical linguistics is concerned with aim at characterising the competence of the language users. But, the preferences the language users display in dealing with syntactically ambiguous sentences constitute a prototypical example of a phenomenon that Chomsky believes belongs to the realm of performance. Chomsky, thus, makes a distinction between the *competence* of a language user and the *performance* of this language user. The competence consists in the knowledge of language which the language user in principle has and the performance is the result of the psychological process that employs this knowledge (in producing or in interpreting language utterances).

There is ambiguity-problem from an intrinsic limitation of linguistic competence-oriented grammars. Such grammars define the sentences of a language and the corresponding structural analyses, but they do not specify a probability ordering or any other ranking between the different sentences or between the different analyses of one sentence. This limitation is even more serious when a grammar is used for processing input which frequently contains mistakes. Many word sequences are strictly speaking grammatical but very implausible; and the number of word sequences of this kind gets larger when a grammar accounts for a larger number of phenomena.

To construct effective language processing systems, we must therefore implement performance-oriented grammars rather than competence-oriented ones. These performance-grammars must not only contain information about the structural possibilities of the general language system, but also about 'accidental' details of the actual language use in a language community, which determine the language experiences of an individual, and thereby influence what kind of utterances this individual expects to encounter, and what structures and meanings these utterances are expected to have.

The linguistic perspective on performance involves the implicit assumption that language behaviour can be accounted for by a system that comprises a competence-grammar as an identifiable sub-component. But because of the ambiguity problem, this assumption is computationally unattractive: if we would find criteria to prefer certain syntactic analyses above others, the efficiency of the whole process might benefit if these criteria were applied in an early stage, integrated with the strictly syntactic rules. This would amount to an integrated implementation of competence and performance notions.

But, we can also go one step further, and fundamentally question the customary concept of a competence-grammar. We can try to account for language-performance without invoking an explicit competence-grammar. This would mean that grammaticality-judgments are to be accounted for as performance phenomena which do not have a different cognitive status than other performance phenomena.

### 1.3.3 Points of convergence and divergence

There is a similarity between Chomsky's notions of *competence* and *performance* and Saussure's notions of *langue* and *parole*. Chomsky explains *competence* as a factor that refers to a speaker's knowledge of his language that enables him to understand an infinite number of sentences often never heard or produced before. Similarly, in Saussure's point of view, the term *langue* represents the general system of language. *Performance* refers to the actual use and realisation of language, which is alike *parole* that relates to the appliance of language, the actual process of speaking.

### Structure rules

To exemplify, how Chomsky and Saussure thought and why they used the terms they did, one can use the phrase 'structure rules'. A sentence (S) can

be fragmented into single units that describe the structure of a sentence. S can be analysed into Noun Phrase (NP) and Verb Phrase (VP); and an NP into Determiner (DET) and Noun (N) or into Phrasal Noun (PN). A native speaker applies all these rules, even though s/he might not be completely aware of them. The general concept of the internalisation of the rules is similar to *competence* while usage of them can be referred to as *performance* and *parole*. *Langue* and *competence* are not too similar here, because *langue* does not contain any dynamic rules, but is only a system of signs.

Apart from this affinity, there is an important difference that has to be mentioned. Chomsky sees *competence* as an attribute of the individual person, whereas Saussure states that language exists perfectly only within a collectivity. Another important difference is that *langue* only refers to the sign system.

### **Innate hypothesis**

In Linguistics, the hypothesis of innateness assumes that every human being has a mental language faculty. It states that human beings are genetically equipped with a Universal Grammar. This contains basic principles and properties that are common to all human languages and, therefore, it represents the basis for language acquisition by supporting and facilitating it.

The main reason for proposing this theory is called the "poverty of the stimulus". It describes the gap between the information about the grammar of a language that we are exposed to during our childhood and the knowledge that we ultimately attain. The stimulus, the linguistic experience, of a child is not sufficient in order to construct the grammar of his/her language. In fact, there are several inadequacies in the stimulus: first, not every sentence a child is exposed to is grammatical. Second, the received information is limited, and third, children gain knowledge without further evidence. Nevertheless, the child succeeds in obtaining linguistic

competence; so, there must be an additional element for support. Thus, language acceptability and use is determined by the stated rules of communication from which the individuals operate. Children in the social milieu perform from the existing linguistic phenomena around them and this makes them belong to that society properly.

### 1.4 SOCIOLINGUISTIC DIFFERENCES

There are numerous factors influencing the way people use language, and these have been investigated by sociolinguists over the years. They include:

- Social Class: The position of the speaker in the society, measured by the level of education, parental background, profession and their effect on syntax and lexis used by the speaker.
- 2) Social Context: The register of the language used, depending on changing situations, i.e., formal language in formal meetings and informal language during meetings with friends, etc. This includes the following:
  - a) *Geographical origins*: There are slight differences in pronunciation between speakers that point at the geographical region which the speaker comes from.
  - b) *Ethnicity*: There are differences between the use of a given language by its native speakers and other ethnic groups.
  - c) Nationality: This is clearly visible in the case of the English language. British English, for example, differs from American English, or Canadian English; Nigerian English differs from Ghanaian English, etc.
  - d) *Gender*: There are differences in patterns of language use between men and women, such as quantity of speech, intonation patterns, etc.
  - e) Age: There is a clear influence of age of the speaker on the use of vocabulary and grammar complexity.

f) *Occupation*: There are differences in language use with regards to professional jargons, slang and professional codes and signs.

We will discuss some of these differences in detail in the Sub-sections that follow.

### 1.4.1 Ethnicity

There are marked differences between the use of a given language by its native speakers and other ethnic groups. This brings in one of the major reasons for the varieties of a particular language. English language has ethnic influence. The British English is different from American English in form and style because of certain ethnic reasons. The native English speakers use English as mother-tongue, which means that there is no negative external effect on their English use, unlike the second language learners of English in India, Nigeria or Ghana. Canadian and Australian English users are different and reflect the ethnic bias of each user of the language.

### 1.4.2 Nationality

There are clearly visible cases of linguistic differences in the use of English language in many countries: British English differs from American English, or Canadian English; Nigerian English differs from Ghanaian English, etc. For example, American English has elements of Americanism but there are other marked varieties like the 'General America' (GA) used in official and government circles different from African American English or Black English, which has elements of profanity, raw and unpolished use of English words. English language in Britain has marked class consciousness, differentiating the royals from the commoners; the educated from the uneducated, etc. English, like French and other world languages, reflect the nationality of the users. However, it is not surprising that the nationality of any speaker of English could be identified merely by listening to his phonological and morphological applications of English.

### 1.4.3 Occupation

There are marked differences in language use with regard to professional jargons, slang and professional codes and signs. Every profession has a register and ways of applying words in discourse. In the legal profession, certain common English words like 'bench', 'wigs', 'bar' are given specified meanings, which are different from the general use. Hence, 'bench' is not a kind of 'seat' but a group of prosecutors in a law court; 'wigs' are not what women adorn their hairs with, but rather a kind of 'dress code' that reflects a lawyer as a learned man; and 'bar' is not a place for drinking or eating like *a pub* or *restaurant*, but rather means the association of lawyers. This is a common phenomenon in the use of language in many professions.

In the medical profession words like 'injection', 'drugs', 'antibiotics', 'malaria', 'diabetes', 'hypertension', 'cancer', etc are often used to reflect sicknesses and the processes of curing sicknesses. It is not wrong to hear these words being used in a general sense as in: "I *injected* patience into my mind when I was waiting for him" or "His general behaviour has a *cancerous* effect on the entire students in the school". Note that these words, even in their adapted use, still reflect the medical semantics.

In sociolinguistics, every profession or occupation has ways by which words are adapted to suit their routines. This occupational language use makes it easy in identifying professions, their basic linguistic requirements and the society's needs for such uses in education and interaction.

### 1.4.4 Class

Sociolinguistics as a field was pioneered through the study of language variation in urban areas. Whereas dialectology studies the geographic distribution of language variation, sociolinguistics focuses on other sources of variation, among them class. Class and occupation are among the most important linguistic markers found in society. One of the fundamental findings of sociolinguistics, which has been hard to disprove, is that class

and language variety are related. Members of the working class tend to speak less standard language, while the lower, middle, and upper middle class will in turn speak closer to the standard. However, the upper class, even members of the upper middle class, may often speak 'less' standard than the middle class. This is because not only class, but class aspirations, is important.

In class aspiration, studies, such as those by William Labov in the 1960s, have shown that social aspirations influence speech patterns. This is also true of class aspirations. In the process of wishing to be associated with a certain class (usually the upper class and upper middle class) people who are moving in that direction socio-economically will adjust their speech patterns to sound like them. However, not being native upper class speakers, they hypercorrect, and end up speaking 'more' standard than those whom they are trying to imitate. The same is true for individuals moving down in socio-economic status.

An important factor influencing the way of formulating sentences is, according to sociolinguists, the social class of the speakers. Thus, there has been a division of social classes proposed in order to make the description accurate. Two main groups of language users, mainly those performing non-manual work and those with more years of education are the 'middle class', while those who perform some kind of manual work are 'working class'. Additional terms 'lower' and 'upper' are frequently used in order to subdivide the social classes. Therefore, differences between upper middle class can be compared with lower working class in any society.

It is notable that people are acutely aware of the differences in speech patterns that mark their social class and are often able to adjust their style to the interlocutor. It is especially true for the members of the middle class who seem eager to use forms associated with upper class, however, in such efforts the forms characteristic of upper class are often overused by the middle class members. The above mentioned process of adopting own speech to reduce social distance is called convergence. Sometimes,

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however, when people want to emphasise the social distance, they make use of the process called divergence, purposefully using idiosyncratic forms.

### 1.4.5 Age

There are several different types of age-based variation one may see within a population. They are: vernacular of a subgroup, with membership typically characterised by a specific age range, age-graded variation, and indications of linguistic change in progress. One example of subgroup vernacular is the speech of street youth. Just as street youth dress differently from the "norm", they also often have their own "language". The reasons for this are to

- (1) enhance their own cultural identity,
- (2) identify with each other,
- (3) exclude others, and
- (4) invoke feelings of fear or admiration from the outside world.

Strictly speaking, this is not truly age-based, since it does not apply to all individuals of that age bracket within the community. Age-graded variation is a stable variation which varies within a population based on age. That is, speakers of a particular age will use a specific linguistic form in successive generations. This is relatively rare. People tend to use linguistic forms that were prevalent when they reached adulthood. So, in the case of linguistic change in progress, one would expect to see variation over a broader range of ages.

### 1.4.6 Gender

Men and women, on average, tend to use slightly different language styles. These differences tend to be quantitative rather than qualitative. That is, to say that women make more minimal responses than men is akin to saying that men are taller than women (i.e., men are on the average taller than

women, but some women are taller than some men). The initial identification of a women's register was by Robin Lakoff (1975), who argued that the style of language served to maintain women's (inferior) role in society ("female deficit approach"). A later refinement of this argument was that gender differences in language reflected a power difference (O'Barr & Atkins, 1980) ("dominance theory"). However, both these perspectives have the language style of men as normative, implying that women's style is inferior.

More recently, Deborah Tannen (1991) has compared gender differences in language as more similar to 'cultural' differences ("cultural difference approach"). Comparing conversational goals, she argued that men have a report style, aiming to communicate factual information, whereas women have a rapport style, more concerned with building and maintaining relationships. Such differences are pervasive across media, including face-to-face conversation. Communication styles are always a product of context, and as such, gender differences tend to be most pronounced in single-gender groups. One explanation for this is that people accommodate their language towards the style of the person they are interacting with.

Thus, in a mixed-gender group, gender differences tend to be less pronounced. A similarly important observation is that this accommodation is usually towards the language style, not the gender of the person. That is, a polite and empathic male will tend to be warmed up to on the basis of their being polite and empathic, rather than their being male.

The basic question in sociolinguistics is: What is it that gives rise to difference in language use? This question forms the basic reason for sociolinguistic inquiries. Differences in use determine all linguistic (inter)action, and much of the work of sociolinguistics focused on the working of differences in linguistic practices. Of course, to focus on differences as the motor for linguistic production, as the generative principle of the very forms of linguistic utterances, was to invert the relation between the linguistic and the social, and to make the social prior.

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For Gumperz, as for Labov, the social caused selections of different codes, but it did not reach into the organisation of code: language remained a discreet autonomous system.

For Halliday, the social was responsible for the shape of the system – for him, language is as it is because of its social functions - and the individual chooses within the potential of the system. Yet the conditions prompting the choice of the individual and the social conditions of the choice are based on select differences. In sociolinguistics, the social is seen as a field of power and the linguistic action of socially formed and positioned individuals is seen as shaped first and foremost by differences in social situations. All linguistic interactions are shaped by differences of varying kinds, and no part of linguistic action escapes the effects.

# LEARNING ACTIVITY 1.5

Explain the need for studying differences in language use.

### Note:

- a) Write your answer in the space given below.
- b) Check the answer with your academic counsellor.

### **SUMMARY**

We began this Unit by giving you the popular meaning of sociolinguistics and how different theorists/linguists view the field differently. However, we pointed out that there indeed was a common platform in their arguments in the sense that there was a point of convergence. We then discussed the concept of language variations and unequivocally that language and society had a symbiotic relationship: while language defined the linguistic behaviour of a group of people in a given society, social structures played a vital role in language use. Subsequently, we studied the two basic theories of language acquisition and language use which had influenced sociolinguistic studies by referring to Saussure's theory of language and parole and Chomsky's theory of competence and performance. At the end of the Unit, we discussed such sociolinguistic differences as ethnicity, nationality, occupation, class, age group and gender that are necessary in the understanding of language use in society.

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# Unit 2

# **Language Varieties**

STRUCUTRE	
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Learning objectives	
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2.1	.2 Language and dialect
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2.2	2.6 Mixture
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2.4 Sty	vles and Registers
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Summary	

### **OVERVIEW**

In Unit 1, we introduced you to the field of sociolinguistics and in that context said that sociolinguistics brings together linguists, sociologists and a host of scholars from a variety of disciplines such as anthropology, psychology, education, etc., to investigate matters of common concern. A number of anthropologists have done work which we can describe as sociolinguistic in nature. The same may be said of certain psychologists, particularly those concerned with the possible effects of linguistic structure on socio-psychological behaviour. Many educators too must make decisions about matters involving language, such as the teaching of standard languages and the skills of literacy. That is to say, there are many interconnections between sociolinguistics and other disciplines. In short, sociolinguistics is a socially relevant variety of linguistics, but it is probably much more. You will be able to form your own views about this field as we proceed through the various topics treated in the Course.

Having discussed the symbiotic relation that exists between language and society, in this Unit we will explain how society is instrumental in creating language varieties as different language communities of the same language treat it differently depending on their need. As an extension of this discussion, we will also introduce the concept of dialect and the associated discourse in making a clear distinction between dialect and language. To further this discussion, we will list such criteria as standardization, vitality, historicity, autonomy, reduction, mixture and other de facto norms that may be used to identify language kinds. Later in the Unit, we will discuss concepts such as accent, patios, received pronunciation and social dialects in the context of dialect. We will close the Unit by discussing language styles, including slang, profanity, etc., and registers.

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

After completing this Unit, you should be able to:

• Explain how society makes language varieties.

- Discuss the notion of dialect versus language, accent, patios and received pronunciation.
- Identify different kinds of language using a few criteria.
- Explain language styles and registers.

### 2.1 VARIETIES OF LANGUAGE AND DIALECTS

All languages exhibit internal variation. That is, each language exists in a number of varieties. For example, the English language has such varieties as Canadian English, London English, the English of football commentaries, and so on. The internal variation allows us to treat all the languages of some multilingual speaker, or community, as a single variety because all the linguistic items concerned may have a similar social distribution. A variety may therefore refer to something greater than a single language as well as something less — less even than something traditionally referred to as a dialect.

We will discuss language varieties and dialects in Sub-sections 2.1.1 and 2.1.2, respectively.

### 2.1.1 Language variety

Charles A. Ferguson (1972) defines language variety as "any body of human speech patterns which is sufficiently homogeneous 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." By stating 'sufficiently homogeneous', it is obvious that Ferguson is not looking for complete homogeneity and allows for some variation, irrespective of whether we consider a language as a whole, a dialect of that language, the speech of a group within that dialect, or, ultimately, each individual in that group. Such variation is a basic fact of linguistic life.

We can define language variety in terms of a specific set of 'linguistic items' or 'human speech patterns' such as sounds, words, grammatical features, etc., and their unique association with such external factors as a geographical area or a social group. Consequently, if we can identify such a unique set of items or patterns for each group in question, it might be possible to say there are such varieties as Standard English, Cockney, lower-class New York City speech, Oxford English, legalese, cocktail party talk, and so on. One important task, then, in sociolinguistics is to determine if such unique sets of items or patterns do exist.

### 2.1.2 Language and dialect

For many people, there can be no confusion at all about what language they speak. For example, they are Chinese, Japanese, or Korean and they speak Chinese, Japanese, and Korean, respectively. It is as simple as that: language and ethnicity are virtually synonymous (Coulmas, 1999).

A Chinese may be surprised to find that another person who appears to be Chinese does not speak Chinese, and some Japanese have gone so far as to claim not to be able to understand Caucasians who speak fluent Japanese. Just as such a strong connection between language and ethnicity may prove to be invaluable in nation-building, it can also be fraught with problems when individuals and groups seek to realize some other identity, e.g., to be both Chinese and American, or to be Canadian rather than Korean-Canadian. For example, many Americans seem particularly reluctant to equate language with ethnicity in their own case. Although they regard English as the 'natural' language of Americans, they do not consider American to be an ethnic label. The results may be the same; only the reasons differ.

Most speakers can give a name to whatever it is they speak. On occasion, some of these names may appear to be strange to those who take a scientific interest in languages, but we should remember that human naming practices often have a large 'unscientific' component to them.

Census-takers in India find themselves confronted with a wide array of language names when they ask people what language or languages they speak. Names are not only ascribed by region, which is what we might expect, but sometimes also by caste, religion, village, and so on. Moreover, they can change from census to census as the political and social climate of the country changes.

While people do usually know what language they speak, they may not always lay claim to be fully qualified speakers of that language. They may experience difficulty in deciding whether what they speak should be called a *language* proper or merely a *dialect* of some language. Such indecision is not surprising: exactly how do you decide what is a language and what is a dialect of a language? What criteria can you possibly use to determine that, whereas variety X is a language, variety Y is only a dialect of a language? What are the essential differences between a language and a dialect?

Haugen (1966a) has pointed out that *language* and *dialect* are ambiguous terms. Ordinary people use these terms quite freely in speech; for them a dialect is almost certainly no more than a local non-prestigious (therefore, powerless) variety of a real language. In contrast, scholars often experience considerable difficulty in deciding whether one term should be used rather than the other in certain situations. As Haugen says, the terms 'represent a simple dichotomy in a situation that is almost infinitely complex.' He points out that the confusion goes back to the Ancient Greeks.

The Greek language that we associate with Ancient Greece was actually a group of distinct local varieties (Ionic, Doric, and Attic) descended by divergence from a common spoken source with each variety having its own literary traditions and uses, e.g., Ionic for history, Doric for choral and lyric works, and Attic for tragedy. Later, Athenian Greek, the  $koin\acute{e}$  – or 'common' language – became the norm for the spoken language as the various spoken varieties converged on the dialect of the major cultural and administrative center. Haugen points out that the Greek situation has provided the model for all later usages of the two terms with the resulting

ambiguity. *Language* can be used to refer either to a single linguistic norm or to a group of related norms, and *dialect* to refer to one of the norms.

The situation is further confused by the distinction the French make between *un dialecte* and *un patois*. The former is a regional variety of a language that has an associated literary tradition, whereas the latter is a regional variety that lacks such a literary tradition. Therefore, *patois* tends to be used pejoratively; it is regarded as something less than a dialect because of its lack of an associated literature. Even a language like Breton, a Celtic language still spoken in parts of Brittany, is called a *patois* because of its lack of a strong literary tradition and the fact that it is not some country's language. However, *dialecte* in French, like *Dialekt* in German, cannot be used in connection with the standard language, i.e., no speaker of French considers Standard French to be a dialect of French.

In contrast, it is not uncommon to find references to Standard English being a dialect – admittedly a very important one – of English. Haugen points out that, while speakers of English have never seriously adopted *patois* as a term to be used in the description of language, they have tried to employ both *language* and *dialect* in a number of conflicting senses. *Dialect* is used both for local varieties of English, e.g., Yorkshire dialect, and for various types of informal, lower-class, or rural speech. Dialect is often considered equivalent to *non-standard* or even *substandard*, when such terms are applied to language, and can connote various degrees of inferiority, with that connotation of inferiority carried over to those who speak a dialect.

We can also observe that questions such as 'Which language do you speak?' or 'Which dialect do you speak?' may be answered quite differently by people who appear to speak in an identical manner. As Gumperz (1982a) has pointed out, many regions of the world provide plenty of evidence for what he calls 'a bewildering array of language and dialect divisions.' He adds:

[S]ociohistorical factors play a crucial role in determining boundaries. Hindi and Urdu in India, Serbian and Croatian in Yugoslavia (as existed earlier), Fanti and Twi in West Africa, Bokmål and Nynorsk in Norway, Kechwa and Aimara in Peru, to name just a few, are recognized as discrete languages both popularly and in law, yet they are almost identical at the level of grammar. On the other hand, the literary and colloquial forms of Arabic used in Iraq, Morocco, and Egypt or the Welsh of North and South Wales, the local dialects of Rajasthan and Bihar in North India are grammatically quite separate, yet only one language is recognized in each case.

The Hindi-Urdu situation that Gumperz mentions is an interesting one. Hindi and Urdu are considered the same language, but one in which certain differences are becoming more and more magnified for political and religious reasons. Hindi is written left to right in the Devanagari script, whereas Urdu is written right to left in the Arabic-Persian script. Whereas Hindi draws on Sanskrit for its borrowings, Urdu draws on Arabic and Persian sources. Large religious and political differences make much of small linguistic differences. The written forms of the two varieties, particularly those favoured by the elites, also emphasize these differences.

Gumperz (1971) points out that everyday living in parts of India, particularly, in the large cities and among educated segments of those communities, requires some complex choices involving the distinction between Hindi and Urdu:

Since independence Hindi has become compulsory in schools, but Urdu continues to be used extensively in commerce, and the Ghazal, the best known form of Urdu poetry, is universally popular. If we look at the modern realist Hindi writers, we find that they utilize both Sanskrit and Persian borrowings. The juxtaposition of the two styles

serves to express subtle shades of meaning and to lend reality to their writings. Similarly, on the conversational level the use of Hindi and Urdu forms is not simply a matter of birth and education. But, just as it is customary for individuals to alternate between dialect and standard depending on the social occasion, so when using the standard itself the speaker may select from a range of alternatives. Hindi and Urdu therefore might best be characterized not in terms of actual speech, but as norms or ideal behavior in the sociologist's sense. The extent to which a speaker's performance in a particular communication situation approximates the norm is a function of a combination of factors such as family background, regional origin, education and social attitude and the like.

So far as everyday use is concerned, therefore, it appears that the boundary between the spoken varieties of Hindi and Urdu is somewhat flexible and one that changes with circumstances. This is exactly what we would expect: there is considerable variety in everyday use but somewhere in the background there is an ideal that can be appealed to proper Hindi or proper Urdu.

The various relationships among languages and dialects discussed can be used to show how the concepts of power and solidarity help us understand what is happening.

Power requires some kind of asymmetrical relationship between entities: one has more of something that is important, e.g., status, money, influence, etc., than the other or others. A language has more power than any of its dialects. It is the powerful dialect but it has become so because of non-linguistic factors, e.g., Standard English and Parisian French. Solidarity, on the other hand, is a feeling of equality that people have with one another. They have a common interest around which they will bond. A feeling of solidarity can lead people to preserve a local dialect or an endangered

language to resist power, or to insist on independence. It accounts for the persistence of local dialects, the modernization of Hebrew, and the separation of Serbo-Croatian into Serbian and Croatian.

The language—dialect situation along the border between the Netherlands and Germany is an interesting one. Historically, there was a continuum of dialects of one language, but the two that eventually became standardized as the languages of the Netherlands and Germany, Standard Dutch and Standard German, are not *mutually intelligible*, that is, a speaker of one cannot understand a speaker of the other.

In the border area, speakers of the local varieties of Dutch and German still exist within that *dialect continuum* and remain largely intelligible to one another, yet the people on one side of the border say they speak a variety of Dutch and those on the other side say they speak a variety of German. The residents of the Netherlands look to Standard Dutch for their model; they read and write Dutch, are educated in Dutch, and watch television in Dutch. Consequently, they say they use a local variety, or dialect, of Dutch in their daily lives. On the other side of the border, German replaces Dutch in all equivalent situations.

The interesting linguistic fact, though, is that there are more similarities between the local varieties spoken on each side of the border than between the one dialect (of Dutch?) and Standard Dutch and the other dialect (of German?) and Standard German, and more certainly than between that dialect and the south German, Swiss, and Austrian dialects of German. However, it is also of interest to note that young speakers of Dutch in this area of the Netherlands are more conscious of the standard language border than older speakers. Apparently, their Dutch identity triumphs over any linguistic connections they have with speakers of the same dialect over the national border.

Another example could be the situation in Scandinavia. Danish, Norwegian (actually two varieties) and Swedish are recognized as different languages,

yet if you speak any one of them you will experience little difficulty in communicating while traveling in Scandinavia (excluding, of course, Finland, or at least the non-Swedish-speaking parts of that country).

Danish and Norwegian share much vocabulary but differ considerably in pronunciation. In contrast, there are considerable vocabulary differences between Swedish and Norwegian but they are similar in pronunciation. Both Danes and Swedes claim good understanding of Norwegian. However, Danes claim to comprehend Norwegians much better than Norwegians claim to comprehend Danes. The poorest mutual comprehension is between Danes and Swedes and the best is between Norwegians and Swedes. These differences in mutual intelligibility appear to reflect power relationships: Denmark long dominated Norway, and Sweden is today the most influential country in the region and Denmark the least powerful.

A somewhat similar situation exists in the relationship of Thai and Lao. The Laos understand spoken Thai and hear Thai constantly on radio and television. Educated Laos can also read, written Thai. However, Thais do not readily understand spoken Lao nor do they read the written variety. Lao is a low-prestige language so far as Thais are concerned. In contrast, Thai has high prestige in Laos. Thais, therefore, are unwilling to expend effort to understand Lao, whereas Laos are willing to make the extra effort to understand Thai.

If we turn our attention to China, we will find that speakers of Cantonese and Mandarin will tell you that they use the same language. However, if one speaker knows only Cantonese and the other only Mandarin, they will not be able to converse with each other: they actually speak different languages, certainly as different as German and Dutch and even Portuguese and Italian. If the speakers are literate, however, they will be able to communicate with each other through a shared writing system. They will almost certainly insist that they speak different *dialects* of Chinese, not different *languages*, for to the Chinese a shared writing

system and a strong tradition of political, social, and cultural unity form essential parts of their definition of *language*.

How do the different varieties of English spoken in Jamaica relate to other varieties of English? Or is that question really answerable? What, above all, is English? How can we define it as something apart from what Speaker A uses, or Speaker B, or Speaker C? If it is something A, B, and C share, just what is it that they do share?

We agree that this Course is in English, and that English is a language, but we may be less certain that various other things we see written or hear spoken in what is called *English* should properly be regarded as English rather than as dialects or varieties of English, perhaps variously described as Indian English, Australian English, New York English, West Country English, African American Vernacular English, non-standard English, Caribbean English, BBC English, and so on.

A language then would be some unitary system of linguistic communication which subsumes a number of mutually intelligible varieties. It would, therefore, be bigger than a single dialect or a single variety. However, that cannot always be the case, for some such systems used by very small numbers of speakers may have very little internal variation. Yet, each must be a language, for it is quite unlike any other existing system. In other words, to qualify as a language, it is not necessary that it should have internal variation and/or it should be 'bigger' than a dialect. For example, many languages have only a handful of speakers; several have actually been known to have had only a single remaining speaker at a particular point in time and the language has 'died' with that speaker.

Yet another difficulty arises from the fact that the terms *language* and *dialect* are also used in an historical sense. It is possible to speak of languages such as English, German, French, Russian and Hindi as Indo-European dialects. In this case, the assumption is that there was once a

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single language (Indo-European) that the speakers of that language (which may have had various dialects) spread to different parts of the world, and that the original language eventually diverged into the various languages we subsume today under the *Indo-European family* of languages.

Perhaps some of the difficulties we have with trying to define the term *language* arise from trying to subsume various different types of systems of communication under that one label.

## LEARNING ACTIVITY 2.1

List the difficulties in describing 'language'.

### Note:

- a) Write your answer in the space given below.
- b) Check the answer with your academic counsellor.

Having discussed the difficulties in describing language and dialect, we must also find out as to whether there are systems in place to overcome these difficulties. It is for this purpose that we identify a few criteria in Section 2.2.

### 2.2 IDENTIFYING LANGUAGE KINDS: CRITERIA

An alternative approach to address the impasse we discussed in the earlier Section, i.e., Section 1.3, is to acknowledge that there indeed are different kinds of languages and to attempt to discover how languages can differ from one another yet still be entities that most of us would want to call languages rather than dialects. It might then be possible to define a dialect as some sub-variety of one or more of these entities.

In this context, some theorists have identified the following seven criteria that may be useful in discussing different kinds of languages: standardization, vitality, historicity, autonomy, reduction, mixture and *de facto* norms. These criteria are considered useful in distinguishing certain languages from others. They also make it possible to speak of some languages as being more 'developed' in certain ways than others, thus addressing a key issue in the language-dialect distinction, since speakers usually feel that languages are generally 'better' than dialects in some sense.

According to these criteria, both English and French are quite obviously standardized, Italian somewhat less so, and the variety known as African American Vernacular English not at all. Haugen (1966a) has indicated certain steps that must be followed if one variety of a language is to become the standard for that language. In addition to formal matters of codification (i.e., the development of such things as grammars and dictionaries) and elaboration (i.e., the use of the standard in such areas as literature, the courts, education, administration, and commerce), Haugen says there are important matters to do with function. For example, a norm must be selected and accepted because neither codification nor elaboration is likely to proceed very far if the community cannot agree on some kind of model to act as a norm. That norm is also likely to be — or to become — an idealized norm, one that users of the language are asked to aspire to rather than one that actually accords with their observed behaviour.

Let us now look at each of these seven criteria in detail.

### 2.2.1 Standardization

Standardization refers to the process by which a language has been codified in some way. That process usually involves the development of such things as grammars, spelling books, dictionaries and possibly a literature. We can often associate specific items or events with standardization, e.g., Caxton's establishment of printing in England, Dr Johnson's dictionary of English published in 1755, etc. Standardization also requires that a measure of agreement be achieved about what is in the language and what is not.

Once a language is standardized, it becomes possible to teach it in a deliberate manner. It takes on ideological dimensions – social, cultural, and sometimes political – beyond the purely linguistic ones. As Fairclough points out (2001), it becomes part of a much wider process of economic, political and cultural unification. It can be employed to reflect and symbolize some kind of identity: regional, social, ethnic or religious.

A standardized variety can also be used to give prestige to speakers, marking off those who employ it from those who do not, i.e., those who continue to speak a non-standard variety. It can, therefore, serve as a kind of goal for those who have somewhat different norms. For example, Standard English and Standard French are such goals for many whose norms are dialects of these languages.

That said, we must also acknowledge the difficulty in defining 'standard English' or 'standard French' accurately. For instance, the difference between 'standard' and 'non-standard' has nothing in principle to do with differences between formal and colloquial language, or with concepts such as 'bad language.' Standard English has colloquial as well as formal variants. Today, Standard English is codified to the extent that the

grammar and vocabulary of English are much the same everywhere in the world. Variation among local standards is really quite minor, being differences of 'flavour' rather than of 'substance,' so that the Singapore, South African and Irish varieties are really very little different from one another so far as grammar and vocabulary are concerned.

Indeed, Standard English is so powerful that it exerts a tremendous pressure on all local varieties. There is therefore considerable pressure on them to converge towards the standard. This latter situation is not unique to English: it is also true in other countries in which processes of standardization are under way. It does, however, sometimes create problems for speakers who try to strike some kind of compromise between local norms and national, even supranational, ones.

The standardization process is also obviously one that attempts either to reduce or to eliminate diversity and variety. However, there may well be a sense in which such diversity and variety are 'natural' to all languages, assuring them of their vitality and enabling them to change.

### **2.2.2** Vitality

The second of the seven criteria, *vitality*, refers to the existence of a living community of speakers. This criterion can be used to distinguish languages that are 'alive' from those that are 'dead.' Two Celtic languages of the United Kingdom are now dead: *Manx* (the old language of the Isle of Man) and Cornish. Manx died out after World War II and Cornish disappeared at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Many of the aboriginal languages of the Americas are also dead. Latin is dead in this sense too for no one speaks it as a native language; it exists only in a written form frozen in time, pronounced rather than spoken, and studied rather than used. Once a language dies, it is gone for all time.

We should note that a language can remain a considerable force even after it is dead, that is, even after it is no longer spoken as anyone's first language and exists almost exclusively in one or more written forms, knowledge of which is acquired only through formal education. Classical Greek and Latin still have considerable prestige in the Western world, and speakers of many modern languages continue to draw on them in a variety of ways. Sanskrit is important in the same way to speakers of Hindi; Classical Arabic provides a unifying force and set of resources in the Islamic world; and Classical Chinese has considerably influenced not only modern Chinese but also Japanese and Korean. Such influences cannot be ignored, because the speakers of languages subject to such influences are generally quite aware of what is happening.

### 2.2.3 Historicity

This refers to the fact that a particular group of people finds a sense of identity through using a particular language. That is to say, it belongs to them. Social, political, religious, or ethnic ties may also be important for the group, but the bond provided by a common language may prove to be the strongest tie of all. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a German nation was unified around the German language just as in the previous century Russians had unified around a revitalized Russian language. Historicity can be long-standing: speakers of the different varieties of colloquial Arabic make much of a common linguistic ancestry, as obviously do speakers of Chinese. It can also, as with Hebrew, be appealed to as a unifying force among a threatened people.

### 2.2.4 Autonomy

The criterion *autonomy* is an interesting concept because it is really one of feeling. A language must be felt by its speakers to be different from other languages. However, this is a very subjective criterion. Ukrainians say their language is quite different from Russian and deplored its Russification when they were part of the Soviet Union. Some speakers of African American Vernacular English maintain that their language is not a variety of English but is a separate language in its own right and refer to it as *Ebonics*. In contrast, speakers of Cantonese and Mandarin deny that they

speak different languages: they maintain that Cantonese and Mandarin are not autonomous languages but are just two dialects of Chinese.

### 2.2.5 Reduction

This refers to the fact that a particular variety may be regarded as a subvariety rather than as an independent entity. Speakers of Cockney will almost certainly say that they speak a variety of English, admit that they are not representative speakers of English, and recognize the existence of other varieties with equivalent subordinate status. Sometimes, the reduction is in the kinds of opportunities afforded to users of the variety. For example, there may be a reduction of resources; that is, the variety may lack a writing system. Or, there may be considerable restrictions in use, e.g., pidgin languages are very much reduced in the functions they serve in society in contrast to standardized languages.

### **2.2.6** Mixture

This refers to feelings speakers have about the purity of the variety they speak. This criterion appears to be more important to speakers of some languages than of others, e.g., more important to speakers of French and German than to speakers of English. However, it partly explains why speakers of pidgins and creoles have difficulty in classifying what they speak as full languages: these varieties are, in certain respects, quite obviously mixed, and the people who speak them often feel that the varieties are neither one thing nor another, but rather are debased, deficient, degenerate, or marginal varieties of some other standard language. (Note that we will study pidgin and creole in Unit 2.)

### 2.2.7 De facto norms

This criterion refers to the feeling that many speakers have that there are both 'good' speakers and 'poor' speakers and that the good speakers represent the norms of proper usage. Sometimes, this means focusing on one particular sub-variety as representing the 'best' usage, e.g., Parisian

French or the Florentine variety of Italian. Standards must not only be established, they must also be observed. When all the speakers of a language feel that it is badly spoken or badly written almost everywhere, that language may have considerable difficulty in surviving.

In fact, such a feeling is often associated with a language that is dying. Concern with the norms of linguistic behaviour or purism may become very important among specific segments of society. For example, insofar as English is concerned, there is a very profitable industry devoted to telling people how they should behave linguistically, what it is 'correct' to say, what to avoid saying, and so on.

### 2.3 DIALECT AND ACCENT

People's feelings about norms have important consequences for an understanding of both variation and change in language. If we apply the above criteria to the different varieties of speech we observe in the world, we will see that not every variety we may want to call a language has the same status as every other variety. English is a language, but so are Dogrib, Haitian Creole, Ukrainian, Latin, Tok Pisin, and Chinese. Each satisfies a different sub-set of criteria from our list.

Although there are important differences among them, we would be loath to deny that any one of them is a language. They are all equals as languages, but that does not necessarily mean that all languages are equal! The first is a linguistic judgment, while the second a social one. As we have just seen, trying to decide whether something is or is not a language or in what ways languages are alike and different can be quite troublesome.

However, we usually experience fewer problems of the same kind with regard to dialects. There is usually little controversy over the fact that they are either regional or social varieties of something that is widely acknowledged to be a language. That is true even of the relationship of Cantonese and Mandarin to Chinese if the latter is given a 'generous' interpretation as a language.

Some people are also aware that the standard variety of any language is actually only the preferred dialect of that language: Parisian French, Florentine Italian, or the Zanzibar variety of Swahili in Tanzania. It is the variety that has been chosen for some reason, perhaps political, social, religious, or economic, or some combination of reasons, to serve as either the model or norm for other varieties. It is the empowered variety. As a result, the standard is often not called a dialect at all, but is regarded as the language itself. It takes on an ideological dimension and becomes the 'right' and 'proper' language of the group of people, the very expression of their being.

One consequence of this is that all other varieties become related to that standard and are regarded as dialects of that standard with none of the power of that standard. Of course, this process usually involves a complete restructuring of the historical facts.

If language L1 differentiates in three areas to become dialects Da, Db and Dc, and then Da is elevated to become a later standard L2, then Db and Dc are really historical variants of L1, not sub-varieties of L2. What happens in practice is that Db and Dc undergo pressure to change towards L2, and L2 – the preferred variety or standard – exerts its influence over the other varieties. We see a good instance of this process in Modern English. The new standard is based on the dialect of the area surrounding London, which was just one of several dialects of Old English, and not the most important for both the Western and Northern dialects were once at least equally as important.

However, in the modern period, having provided the base for Standard English, this dialect exerts a strong influence over all the other dialects of England so that it is not just first among equals but rather represents the modern language itself to the extent that the varieties spoken in the west and north are generally regarded as its local variants. Historically, these varieties arise from different sources, but now they are viewed only in relation to the standardized variety. A final comment seems called for with

regard to the terms *language* and *dialect*. A dialect is a subordinate variety of a language, so that we can say that Texas English and Swiss German are, respectively, dialects of English and German.

The language name (i.e., *English* or *German*) is the superordinate term. We can also say of some languages that they contain more than one dialect; e.g., English, French and Italian are spoken in various dialects. If a language is spoken by so few people, or so uniformly, that it has only one variety, we might be tempted to say that *language* and *dialect* become synonymous in such a case. However, another view is that it is inappropriate to use *dialect* in such a situation because the requirement of subordination is not met. Consequently, to say that we have dialect A of language X must imply also the existence of dialect B of language X, but to say we have language Y is to make no claim about the number of dialect varieties in which it exists: it may exist in only a single variety, or it may have two (or more) subordinate dialects: dialects A, B, and so on.

### Vernacular

Finally, two other terms are important in connection with some of the issues discussed above: *vernacular* and *koiné*. Petyt (1980, p. 25) defines the former as 'the speech of a particular country or region,' or, more technically, 'a form of speech transmitted from parent to child as a primary medium of communication.'

If that form of speech is Standard English, then Standard English is the vernacular for that particular child; if it is a regional dialect, then that dialect is the child's vernacular. A *koiné* is 'a form of speech shared by people of different vernaculars – though for some of them the *koiné* itself may be their vernacular.' A koiné is a common language, but not necessarily a standard one. Petyt's examples of koinés are Hindi for many people in India and Vulgar Latin (*vulgar*: 'colloquial' or 'spoken') in the Roman Empire. The original koiné was, of course, the Greek koiné of the Ancient World, a unified version of the Greek dialects, which after

Alexander's conquests (*circa* 330 BCE) became the lingua franca of the Western world, a position it held until it was eventually superseded, not without a struggle, by Vulgar Latin.

#### 2.3.1 Dialects vs. Patois

Regional variation in the way a language is spoken is likely to provide one of the easiest ways of observing variety in language. As you travel throughout a wide geographical area in which a language is spoken, and particularly if that language has been spoken in that area for many hundreds of years, you are almost certain to notice differences in pronunciation, in the choices and forms of words and in syntax. There may even be very distinctive local flavour in the language which you notice as you move from one location to another. Such distinctive varieties are usually called *regional dialects* of the language.

Note that the term *dialect* is sometimes used only if there is a strong tradition of *writing* in the local variety. Old English and to a lesser extent Middle English had dialects in this sense. In the absence of such a tradition of writing the term *patois* may be used to describe the variety. However, many linguists writing in English tend to use *dialect* to describe both situations and rarely, if at all, use *patois* as a scientific term. You are likely to encounter it only as a kind of anachronism, as in its use by Jamaicans, who often refer to the variety of English spoken on the island as a 'patois.'

The *dialect-patois* distinction actually seems to make more sense in some situations, e.g., France, than in others. In Medieval France, a number of languages flourished and several were associated with strong literary traditions. However, as the language of Paris asserted itself from the 14<sup>th</sup> century onwards, these traditions withered. Parisian French spread throughout France, and, even though that spread is still not yet complete, it drastically reduced the importance of the local varieties: they continue to exist largely in spoken forms only; they are disfavored socially and politically; they are merely *patois* to those who extol the virtues of

Standard French. However, even as these varieties have faded, there have been countervailing moves to revive them as many younger residents of the areas in which they are spoken see them as strong indicators of identities they wish to preserve.

There are some further interesting differences in the use of the terms dialect and patois. Patois is usually used to describe only rural forms of speech; we may talk about an urban dialect, but to talk about an urban patois seems strange. Patois also seems to refer only to the speech of the lower strata in society; again, we may talk about a middle-class dialect but not, apparently, about a middle-class patois. Finally, a dialect usually has a wider geographical distribution than a patois, so that, whereas regional dialect and village patois seem unobjectionable, the same cannot be said for regional patois and village dialect. However, as I indicated above, many Jamaicans refer to the popular spoken variety of Jamaican English as a patois rather than as a dialect. So again the distinction is in no way an absolute one.

#### Dialect geography

Dialect geography is the term used to describe attempts made to map the distributions of various linguistic features so as to show their geographical provenance. For example, in seeking to determine features of the dialects of English and to show their distributions, dialect geographers try to find answers to questions such as the following: Is this an *r*-pronouncing area of English, as in words like *car* and *cart*, or is it not? What past tense form of *drink* do speakers prefer?

What names do people give to particular objects in the environment, e.g., elevator or lift, petrol or gas, carousel or roundabout? Sometimes, maps are drawn to show actual boundaries around such features, boundaries called isoglosses, so as to distinguish an area in which a certain feature is found from areas in which it is absent. When several such isoglosses coincide, the result is sometimes called a dialect boundary. Then we may

be tempted to say that speakers on one side of that boundary speak one dialect and speakers on the other side speak a different dialect.

#### 2.3.2 Social dialects

The term *dialect* can also be used to describe the differences in speech associated with various social groups or classes. There are social dialects as well as regional ones. An immediate problem is that of defining *social group* or *social class*, giving proper weight to the various factors that can be used to determine social position, e.g., occupation, place of residence, education, 'new' versus 'old' money, income, racial or ethnic origin, cultural background, caste, religion and so on. Such factors as these do appear to be related fairly directly to how people speak. There is a British public-school dialect, and there is an African American Vernacular English dialect found in cities such as New York, Detroit and Buffalo. Many people also have stereotypical notions of how other people speak.

Whereas regional dialects are geographically based, social dialects originate among social groups and are related to a variety of factors, the principal ones apparently being social class, religion and ethnicity. In India, for example, caste, one of the clearest of all social differentiators, quite often determines which variety of a language a speaker uses. In a city like Baghdad the Christian, Jewish and Muslim inhabitants speak different varieties of Arabic. In this case, the first two groups use their variety solely within the group but the Muslim variety serves as a lingua franca, or common language, among the groups. Consequently, Christians and Jews who deal with Muslims must use two varieties: their own at home and the Muslim variety for trade and in all inter-group relationships.

Ethnic variation can be seen in the United States, where one variety of English has become so identified with an ethnic group that it is often referred to as African American Vernacular English. Labov's work in New York City shows that there are other ethnic differences too: speakers of Jewish and Italian ethnicity differentiate themselves from speakers of either the standard variety or the African American Vernacular English. On occasions, they actually show *hyper-corrective* tendencies in that they tend to overdo certain imitative behaviours: Italians are inclined to be in the vanguard of pronouncing words like *bad* and *bag* with a vowel resembling that of *beard* and Jews in the vanguard of pronouncing words like *dog* with a vowel something like that of *book*. A possible motivation for such behaviour is a desire to move away from the Italian and Yiddish vowels that speakers could so easily use in these words but which would be clear ethnic markers. However, the movement prompted by such avoidance behaviour goes beyond the prevailing local norm and becomes an ethnic characteristic that serves as an indicator of identity and solidarity.

Studies in *social dialectology*, the term used to refer to this branch of linguistic study, confront many difficult issues, particularly when investigators venture into cities. Cities are much more difficult to characterize linguistically than are rural hamlets; variation in language and patterns of change are much more obvious in cities, e.g., in family structures, employment and opportunities for social advancement or decline. Migration, both in and out of cities, is also usually a potent linguistic factor. Cities also spread their influence far beyond their limits and their importance should never be underestimated in considering such matters as the standardization and diffusion of languages.

Finally, the term *dialect*, particularly when it is used in reference to regional variation, should not be confused with the term *accent*. Standard English, for example, is spoken in a variety of accents, often with clear regional and social associations: there are accents associated with North America, Singapore, India, Liverpool, Boston, New York and so on. However, many people who live in such places show a remarkable uniformity to one another in their grammar and vocabulary because they speak Standard English and the differences are merely those of accent, i.e., how they pronounce what they say.

#### 2.3.3 Received Pronunciation

One English accent has achieved a certain eminence, the accent known as *Received Pronunciation* (or RP), the accent of perhaps as few as 3% of those who live in England. The 'received' in Received Pronunciation is a little bit of old-fashioned snobbery. What it means is that the accent allows one to be received into the 'better' parts of society! This accent is of fairly recent origin, becoming established as prestigious only in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and not even given its current label until the 1920s.

In the United Kingdom at least, it is usually associated with a higher social or educational background, with the BBC and the professions, and is most commonly taught to students learning English as a foreign language. For many such students, it is the only accent they are prepared to learn, and a teacher who does not use it may have difficulty in finding a position as a teacher of English in certain non-English-speaking countries in which a British accent is preferred over a North American one. In fact, those who use this accent are often regarded as speaking 'unaccented' English because it lacks a regional association within England.

Other names for this accent are *the Queen's English*, *Oxford English*, and *BBC English*. However, there is no unanimous agreement that the Queen does in fact use RP, a wide variety of accents can be found among the staff and students at Oxford University, and regional accents are now widely used in the various BBC services.

Trudgill (1995) has pointed out what he considers to be the most interesting characteristics of RP: the relatively very small numbers of speakers who use it do not identify themselves as coming from any particular geographical region; 'RP is largely confined to England and there it is a *non-localized* accent; and it is not necessary to speak RP to speak Standard English because Standard English can be spoken with any regional accent, and in the vast majority of cases normally is. It is also

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interesting to observe that the 1997 *English Pronouncing Dictionary* published by Cambridge University Press abandoned the label RP in favour of BBC English even though this latter term is not unproblematic, as the BBC itself has enlarged the accent pool from which it draws its newsreaders.

The most generalized accent in North America is sometimes referred to as *General American* or, more recently, as *network English*, the accent associated with announcers on the major television networks. Other languages often have no equivalent to RP. For example, German is spoken in a variety of accents, none of which is deemed inherently any better than any other. Educated regional varieties are preferred rather than some exclusive upper-class accent that has no clear relationship to personal achievement.

To reiterate, it is impossible to speak English without an accent. There is nothing called 'unaccented English.' RP is an accent, a social one rather than a regional one. However, we must note that there are different evaluations of the different accents, evaluations arising from social factors not linguistic ones. For example, when language users are in a relationship of domination and subordination, the dominant is normal and the subordinate is different from normal. And so, it is with accent. In other words, we tend to feel that people in power are perceived as speaking normal, unaccented English. Any speech that is different from that constructed norm is called an accent.

### LEARNING ACTIVITY 2.2

Explain the social implication of RP.

#### Note:

- a) Write your answer in the space given below.
- b) Check the answer with your academic counsellor.

#### 2.4 STYLES AND REGISTERS

Having introduced the concepts of dialect, accent, patios, RP, etc., it is time for us to discuss language styles. It is not uncommon to consider the style of speaking a form of dialect. This is similar to the situation we discussed earlier in the context of 'accent' or RP. In addition, as we mentioned at the beginning of this Unit, there indeed are varieties of language. One aspect of language varieties relates to registers or jargons. People engaged in different vocations or occupations use different 'kind' of language (vocabulary) which is assumed to be peculiar to those respective vocations/occupations. It is therefore appropriate for us to touch upon this aspect of language use as well. Accordingly, in Sub-sections 2.4.1 and 2.4.2, we will discuss styles and registers, respectively.

#### **2.4.1 Styles**

The study of dialects is further complicated by the fact that speakers can adopt different *styles* of speaking. We can speak either very formally or very informally, depending on the circumstances. For example, while ceremonial occasions (e.g., University Graduation Day/Convocation) invariably require very formal speech; public lectures could be less formal; casual conversations quite informal and conversations between friends on matters of little consequences may be extremely informal and casual.

How do we decide on the level of formality?

It depends on a variety of factors including the kind of occasion; the various social, age and other differences that exist between the participants; the particular task that is involved, e.g., writing or speaking; the emotional involvement of one or more of the participants and so on. While it may be difficult to characterize discrete levels of formality, it is nevertheless possible to show that native speakers of all languages control a range of stylistic varieties. It is also quite possible to predict with considerable confidence the stylistic features that a native speaker will tend to employ on certain occasions.

#### Clichés

By a cliché, we generally mean a phrase or a word that has been overused and as a consequence has lost its original effectiveness or power. It can also be seen as an overused idea, an overused activity or notion. In short, clichés are phrases or expressions that have lost their impact through overuse. Very often, many lean on clichés when they are unable to come up with an original expression. But, clichés are indeed part of language styles. Clichéd expressions include: add insult to injury; agree to disagree; busy as a bee; calm before the storm; last but not the least; burning midnight oil, making a mountain out of a mole, etc.

#### Slangs as sociolinguistic forms

A slang expression is an informal, non-standard word and phrase, generally shorter lived than the expressions of non-standard, ordinary colloquial speech, and typically formed by creative, often witty, juxtapositions of words or images. Slang can be contrasted with jargon (technical language of occupational or other groups) and with argot, but the borderlines separating these categories from slang are greatly blurred. Slang is traditionally considered as a vulgar, offensive, and profane form of language with a strong colour of irreverence and yet vitality in a society. It is generally labelled as a linguistic taboo which should not be appearing in most formal social occasions.

Slangs tend to originate in sub-cultures within a society. Occupational groups (for example, loggers, police, medical professionals, and computer specialists) are prominent originators of both jargon and slang. A jargon is the vocabulary (lexical items of expression) of a restricted code like a register while slang is a type of restricted language like the secret language of a cult, whose vocabulary component is necessarily a jargon. Slang expressions often embody attitudes and values of group members. They may thus contribute to a sense of group identity and may convey to the listener information about the speaker's background.

Slang refers to short-lived coinages that do not belong to a language's standard vocabulary. Before an apt expression becomes slang, however, it must be widely adopted by members of the subculture. At this point, slang and jargon overlap greatly. If the sub-culture has enough contact with the mainstream culture, its figures of speech become slang expressions known to the whole society. A slang expression may suddenly become widely used and as quickly dated.

It may become accepted as standard speech, either in its original slang meaning (bus, from omnibus) or with an altered, possibly tamed meaning (jazz, which originally had sexual connotations). Some expressions have

persisted for centuries as slang (booze for alcoholic beverage, fag for cigarette). In the 20th century, mass media and rapid travel have speeded up both the circulation and the demise of slang terms. In some cases, slang may provide a needed name for an object or action (walkie-talkie, a portable two-way radio; tailgating, driving too close behind another vehicle), or it may offer an emotional outlet (buzz off! for go away!) or a satirical or patronising reference.

It may provide euphemisms (*john*, *head*, *can*, and in Britain, *loo*, all for toilet, itself originally a euphemism), and it may allow its user to create a shock effect by using a pungent slang expression in an unexpected context. Slang has provided myriad synonyms for for money (*moola*, *bread*, *scratch*), for food (*grub*, *slop*, *garbage*), etc.

Sociological analysis of slang has revealed that the use of slang has sociolinguistic implications. It is apparent that every community harbours its own unique set of lexical vocabulary which is fully intelligible only to the initiates; this unique and elaborate lexicon thus serves to achieve group identity and has many other social implications. However, slang has traditionally been neglected, if not ignored, in sociolinguistics. Therefore, formal and theoretical discussions of slang in sociolinguistic perspectives are largely absent.

#### Profanity in language usage

Terms of profanity have historically been taboo words. Nonetheless, some words that were originally considered profane have become much less offensive with the increasing secularity of society. Others, primarily racial or ethnic epithets, can be considered part of hate speech and are now considered more profane than they once were. Many of the words now considered most profane are held to be so because they were created to insult and disparage a particular group. Some of the targets of these words have however attempted to reclaim them and reduce their power as insults.

The offensiveness or perceived intensity or vulgarity of the various profanities can change over time, with certain words becoming more or less offensive as time goes on. For example, in modern times the word *piss* is usually considered mildly vulgar and somewhat impolite, whereas the King James Bible employs it where modern translators would prefer the word *urine*.

A profanity will have an original meaning (which may change across time and language) which in itself may give some cause for offense. Additionally, many profanities will have applied meanings of their own, usually associated to their context and which therefore may vary significantly depending upon the intended purpose of the word in the sentence.

The degree to which a profanity is offensive relies upon how the use of the word affects an individual. Some will consider the original meaning of a word to be offensive or a subject not fit for polite conversation. Some will feel that certain words, having an established social taboo are simply offensive, regardless of any context; others will find profanities offensive mainly when used in a way deliberately intended to offend. Furthermore, some may be in the habit of using profanity in order to seem cool. Thus, it can even be used as terms of endearment.

#### 2.4.2 Registers

One of the complicating factors in any study of language varieties pertains to what are called *registers*. Registers are sets of language items associated with discrete occupational or social groups. Surgeons, journalists, airline pilots, bank managers, sales clerks, jazz fans and pimps employ different registers. As Ferguson (1994) points out, "People participating in recurrent communication situations tend to develop similar vocabularies, similar features of intonation, and characteristic bits of syntax and phonology that they use in these situations." This kind of variety is a register.

Of course, one person may control a variety of registers. For example, one can be a stockbroker and an archeologist, or a mountain climber and an economist. Each register helps him/her to express their identity at a specific time or place, i.e., how he/she seeks to present himself/herself to others.

Dialect, style and register differences are largely independent. That is to say, we can talk casually about mountain-climbing in a local variety of a language, or we can write a formal technical report on wine-making. One could be judged either as a 'better' or as a 'worse' than other speakers, who have much the same background. It is quite usual to find some people who are acknowledged to speak a language, or one of its varieties, better or worse than others.

Value judgments of this kind sometimes emerge for reasons that are hard to explain. For example, there appears to be a subtle bias built into the way people tend to judge dialects. Quite often, though not always, people seem to exhibit a preference for rural dialects over urban ones. In England, the speech of Northumbria seems more highly valued than the speech of Tyneside and certainly the speech of Liverpool seems less valued than that of northwest England as a whole. Similarly, in North America, the speech of upstate New York does not have the negative characteristics associated with much of the speech of New York City. Why such different attitudes should exist is not easy to say. Is it a preference for things that appear to be 'older' and 'more conservative,' i.e., a subconscious dislike of some of the characteristics of urbanization, including uncertainty about what standards should prevail, or some other reason or reasons?

Sometimes these notions of 'better' and 'worse' solidify into those of 'correctness' and 'incorrectness.' The popular explanation of 'correct' and 'incorrect' speech reduces the matter to one of knowledge versus ignorance. There is such a thing as correct English. An ignorant person does not know the correct forms; therefore, he cannot help using incorrect ones. In the process of education, one learns the correct forms and, by

practice and an effort of will (e.g., 'careful speaking'), acquires the habit of using them.

While each of us may have productive control over only a very few varieties of a language, we can usually comprehend many more varieties and relate all of these to the concept of a 'single language.' That is, our *receptive* linguistic ability is much greater than our *productive* linguistic ability. An interesting problem for linguists is knowing how best to characterize this 'knowledge' that we have, which enables us to recognize something as being in the language but yet marked as 'different' in some way. Is it part of our *competence* or part of our *performance* in the Chomskyan sense? (Note that we will discuss 'competence' and 'performance' later in the Course). Or is that a false dichotomy? The first question is as yet unanswered but, as the second suggests, it could possibly be unanswerable.

As mentioned, registers are referred to as jargons as well. To reiterate, jargon is the vocabulary used exclusively by a particular group, such as the members of a profession or a subculture. A jargon comprises the specialised vocabulary of a particular trade or profession, especially when it is incomprehensible to outsiders, as with legal jargon. Although a jargon sometimes communicates new ideas, it also serves to separate people inside the group from people outside of it.

By its very definition, jargon is only understood by a select few and is therefore usually not the most effective tool available to you for communicating your ideas. Medicine, law, education, the military, the entertainment world, and most academic disciplines have their own jargons. The jargons of bureaucracy and business, however, are probably the most widespread and are thus the jargons many people know best and are most tempted to use. In many business settings, using jargon is almost required, but you should try to avoid it as much as possible. While some of your colleagues may see jargon as the badge of a true insider, many others will regard it as pretentious, smug, and evidence of a lazy mind.

#### Sociolinguistics

Argot refers to a non-standard vocabulary used by secret groups, particularly criminal organisations, usually intended to render communications incomprehensible to outsiders.

Let us now reflect on our discussion in this Unit.

Consider what stylistic characteristics you would associate with each of the following activities:

- talking to a young child;
- writing an essay for a professor;
- playing a board game with a close friend;
- approaching a stranger on the street to ask for directions;
- attending a funeral;
- talking to yourself;
- getting stopped for speeding;
- burning your finger.

One of the easiest ways of persuading yourself that there are registers associated with different occupations is to read materials associated with different callings. You can quickly compile register differences from such sources as law reports, hairdressing or fashion magazines, scholarly journals, recipe books, sewing patterns, instruction manuals, textbooks, and so on. The supply is almost inexhaustible! You might compile lists of words from various sources and find out how long it takes one of your fellow students to identify the particular 'sources' as you read the lists aloud.

Hudson (1996) says 'your dialect shows who (or what) you *are*, whilst your register shows what you are *doing*.' He acknowledges that 'these concepts are much less distinct than the slogan implies'. However, you might use them to sort out what would be dialect and register for a Professor of Sociology from Mumbai; a hairdresser from New Delhi working in

Lucknow; an Indian naval commander; a sheep farmer in Andhra Pradesh; and a 'street-wise' person from any location you might choose.

Wolfram and Fasold (1974) offer the following working definitions of what they called *standard*, *super-standard* (or *hypercorrect*) and *substandard* (or *nonstandard*) speech. They say of someone that:

- If his/her reaction to the *form* (not the content) of the utterance is neutral and s/he can devote full attention to the meaning, then the form is standard for him/her.
- If his/her attention is diverted from the meaning of the utterance because it sounds 'snooty,' then the utterance is super-standard.
- If his/her attention is diverted from the message because the utterance sounds like poor English, then the form is substandard.

Consider what judgments you would make about a person

- who always clearly and carefully articulates every word he/she says in all circumstances.
- who insists on saying both *between you and I* and *It's I*.
- who uses malapropisms.
- who, in speaking rapidly in succession to a number of others, easily shifts from one variety of speech to another.

What do you regard as the characteristics of a 'good' speaker of English and of a 'poor' speaker? Consider such matters as pronunciation, word choice, syntactic choice, fluency, and style.

There seems to be evidence that many people judge themselves to speak 'better' than they actually do, or, if not better, at least less casually than they do. Do you know of any such evidence? If it is the case that people do behave this way, why might it be so? Hudson (1996) says that 'lay people' sometimes ask Linguists questions such as 'Where is real Cockney spoken?'

They assume such questions are meaningful. Another is 'Is Jamaican creole a kind of English or not?' Hudson says that such questions 'are not the kind of questions that can be investigated scientifically.'

#### **SUMMARY**

In this Unit, we explained the role of society in forming language varieties, consequent to the differing treatments meted out by different language communities of the same language. In this context, we also introduced the concept of dialect and explained the associated difficulty in making a distinction between dialect and language. To further this discussion on language and dialect, we explained the certain criteria (standardization, vitality, historicity, autonomy, reduction, mixture and other de facto norms) that could be used for the identification of language kinds. Subsequently, we discussed concepts such as accent, patios, RP and social dialects in the context of dialect. We closed the Unit by discussing language styles and registers.

# Unit 3

## **Pidgins and Creoles**

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## **OVERVIEW**

In this Unit, we will discuss the concepts of pidgin and creole. Though traditionally considered 'marginal languages', these make rich linguistic contributions in the context of sociolinguistics. We will begin the Unit by explaining the notion of lingua franca before discussing pidgins and creoles and the pidginization and creolization processes. We will explain that when two groups of people speaking different languages come into contact with one another they tend to communicate with a language in a variety whose grammar and vocabulary are very much reduced in extent and which is native to neither party. Such a language is a pidgin. We will then introduce how a creole (language) gets formed as a consequence of the constant use of a pidgin over a period of time. That is, when a pidgin becomes the first language or mother tongue of a new generation of speakers, that language is called a creole. We will discuss this elaborately to establish that a creole is a pidgin which has expanded in structure and vocabulary to express the range of meanings and serve the range of functions required of a first language. We will also discuss the various aspects involved in the pidginization and creolization processes such as relexification, creole continuum, etc.

#### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

After completing the Unit, you should be able to:

- Give the meaning of a pidgin and a creole.
- Discuss in detail the pidginization and careolization processes.
- Explain the post-creolization language formation, re-lexification and creole continuum.

#### 3.1 PIDGIN AND CREOLE: AN EXPOSITION

Among the many languages of the world are a few often assigned to a somewhat marginal position: the various *lingua franca*, pidgins and creoles. To the best of our knowledge, all have existed since time immemorial, but, in comparison with what we know about many 'fully fledged' languages, we know comparatively little about them. There is a

paucity of historical records; the history of serious study of such languages goes back only a few decades; and, because of the circumstances of their use, they have often been regarded as being of little intrinsic value or interest. Until recently, pidgins and creoles have generally been viewed as uninteresting linguistic phenomena, being notable mainly for linguistic features they have been said to 'lack,' e.g., articles, the copula, and grammatical inflections, rather than those they possess, and those who speak them have often been treated with disdain, even contempt.

Hymes (1971) has pointed out that before the 1930s, pidgins and creoles were largely ignored by Linguists, who regarded them as 'marginal languages' at best. Some Linguists were even advised to keep away from studying them, lest they jeopardize their careers! As languages of those without political and social power, literatures and 'culture,' they could be safely and properly ignored, for what could they possibly tell us about anything that English and French or even Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit could not?

Fortunately, in recent years, such attitudes have changed and, as serious attention has been given to pidgins and creoles, Linguists have discovered many interesting characteristics about them, characteristics that appear to bear on fundamental issues to do with all languages, 'fully fledged' and 'marginal' alike. Moreover, pidgins and creoles are invaluable to those who use them. Not only are they essential to everyday living but they are also frequently important markers of identity.

In an interview in 1978, a schoolboy in Belize had this to reportedly say about his language: 'Well, usually in Belize you find the language, the main language you know is this slang that I tell you about, the Creole. And you'd recognize them by that, you know. They usually have this, you know, very few of them speak the English or some of them usually speak Spanish.' The study of pidgins and creoles has become an important part of linguistic and, especially, sociolinguistic study, with its own literature and, of course, its own controversies.

With pidgins and creoles we can see processes of language origin and change going on around us. We can also witness how people are attracted to languages, how they exploit what linguistic resources they have, and how they forge new identities. We do not have to wait a millennium to see how a language changes; a few generations suffice. To some extent, too, the speakers of such languages have benefited as more and more of them have come to recognize that what they speak is not just a 'bad' variety of this language or that, but a language or a variety of a language with its own legitimacy, i.e., its own history, structure, array of functions, and the possibility of winning eventual recognition as a 'proper' language.

#### Lingua franca

People who speak different languages who are forced into contact with each other must find some way of communicating, a *lingua franca*. In a publication concerned with the use of vernacular languages in education published in Paris in 1953, UNESCO defined a lingua franca as 'a language which is used habitually by people whose mother tongues are different in order to facilitate communication between them.' A variety of other terms can be found which describe much the same phenomenon. Samarin (1968) lists four:

- a trade language (e.g., Hausa in West Africa or Swahili in East Africa);
- 2. a contact language (e.g., Greek koiné in the Ancient World);
- 3. an *international language* (e.g., English throughout much of our contemporary world); and
- 4. an auxiliary language (e.g., Esperanto or Basic English).

They usually develop as a consequence of population migration (forced or voluntary) or for purposes of trade. Still another kind of lingua franca is a *mixed language*. Bakker (1997) describes one such language, Michif, a

mixture of Cree and French spoken mainly in Canada by well under a thousand people of *métis* (aboriginal and French) ancestry.

Michif is sometimes characterized as a language that mixes Cree verbs and French nouns but probably more accurately is one that uses Cree grammar and French vocabulary. It is a clear marker of group identity for those who use it and emerged to express 'a new ethnic identity, mixed Cree and French. A new language was needed to express that identity. The most obvious way to form a new language was through mixing the two community languages, Cree and French' (Bakker and Papen, 60 *Pidgins and Creoles*, 1997). Winford (2003) adds that the Michif are an example of 'newly emerged social groups who wanted a language of their own . . . [and] who saw themselves as distinct from either of the cultural groups from which they descended.'

At one time or another, Greek koiné and Vulgar Latin were in widespread use as lingua francas in the Mediterranean world and much of Europe. Sabir was a lingua franca of the Mediterranean (and later far beyond); originating in the Middle Ages and dating back at least to the Crusades, it survived into the twentieth century. In other parts of the world Arabic, Mandarin, Hindi, and Swahili have served, or do serve, as lingua francas. Of these, Arabic was a lingua franca associated with the spread of Islam. Today, English is used in very many places and for very many purposes as a lingua franca, e.g., in travel and often in trade, commerce, and international relations (see pp. 379–80).

A lingua franca can be spoken in a variety of ways. Although both Greek koiné and Vulgar Latin served at different times as lingua francas in the Ancient World, neither was a homogeneous entity. Not only were they spoken differently in different places, but individual speakers varied widely in their ability to use the languages. English serves today as a lingua franca in many parts of the world: for some speakers it is a native language, for others a second language, and for still others a foreign language.

However, in the last two categories abilities in the language may vary widely from native-like to knowledge of only some bare rudiments. This is certainly the case in India, where even though Hindi is the official language, English, spoken in all kinds of ways, is widely used as a lingua franca. Swahili is a lingua franca of East Africa. On the coast it has long been spoken as a native language. As Swahili spread inland in Tanzania, it was simplified in structure, and even further inland, in Zaïre, it underwent still further simplification.

Such simplification was also accompanied by a reduction in function, i.e., the simplified varieties were not used for as many purposes as the fuller variety of the coast. In rural northern parts of Zaïre even more simplification resulted so that the Swahili spoken there became virtually unintelligible to coastal residents. While the existence of this variety demonstrates that Swahili was being used as a lingua franca, what many people were actually using was a pidginized form, Zaïre Pidgin Swahili. In this respect, those who used that variety were not unlike many today who use English as a lingua franca: they use local pidginized versions of English, not Standard English. Today, that Zaïre Pidgin English has become a creole, Restructured Swahili, and it is considerably different from the Swahili of the coast.

In North America, Chinook Jargon was used extensively as a lingua franca among native peoples of the northwest, from British Columbia into Alaska, during the second half of the nineteenth century. ('Jargon' is one of the original derogatory terms for a pidgin.) Speakers of English and French also learned it. Today Chinook Jargon is virtually extinct. Its vocabulary came from various sources: principally, Nootka, Chinook, Chehalis (all Amerindian languages), French, and English.

The sound system tended to vary according to the native language of whoever spoke Chinook Jargon. The grammar, ostensibly Chinook, was extremely reduced so that it is really quite difficult to say with conviction that it is more Chinook than anything else. Even though today hardly anyone can use Chinook Jargon, a few words from it have achieved limited use in English: e.g., *potlach* ('lavish gift-giving'), *cheechako* ('greenhorn'), and possibly *high mucky-muck* ('arrogant official') (see Taylor, 1981).

There is an interesting distributional relationship between Chinook Jargon and another lingua franca used widely by native peoples, Plains Sign Language: Chinook Jargon is basically a coastal phenomenon and Plains Sign Language an interior one on the plateau. Hymes (1980, pp. 416–17) has observed that we do not know why the plateau developed a sign language and the coast a jargon. Perhaps the reason was slavery or the amount of slavery.

The Chinook held slaves in considerable numbers, mostly obtained by purchases from surrounding peoples, but also secondarily through raiding parties. It seems likely that the slaves learned a reduced form of Chinook and that this reduced form was used between them and their owners. As we will see, it is in observations such as these that we may find clues as to the origin and spread of pidgins and creoles and come to realize how important social factors have been in their development.

## LEARNING ACTIVITY 3.1

Explain lingua franca.

#### Note:

- a) Write your answer in the space given below.
- b) Check the answer with your academic counsellor.

#### 3.2 PIDGINS AND PIDGINISATION

The word pidgin, formerly also spelled *pigion*, derives from a Chinese Pidgin English pronunciation of business. Originally used to describe Chinese Pidgin English, it was later generalised to refer to any pidgin. Pidgin may also be used as the specific name for a local pidgin in places where they are spoken. For example, the name of 'Tok Pisin' derives from the English words *talk pidgin*, and its speakers usually refer to it simply as "Pidgin" when speaking English.

#### 3.2.1 Concept of Pidgin

In a people contact situations involving two groups speaking different languages, to communicate with each other, two or more people use a language in a variety whose grammar and vocabulary are very much reduced in extent and which is native to neither side. Such a language is a pidgin. That is to say, a pidgin is a form of language created by members of two or more linguistic groups in contact as a means of intercommunication, the most basic grammatical rules of which are common to all its habitual users regardless of their own primary language, while at least one and perhaps all of the participating groups recognise that this means of intercommunication is not the primary language of any other.

A pidgin is a simplified language that develops as a means of communication between two or more groups that do not have a language in common in situations such as trade. Pidgins are not the native language of any speech community, but are, instead, learned as second languages. Pidgins usually have low prestige with respect to other languages. Not all simplified or "broken" forms of language are pidgins. Pidgins have their own norms of usage which must be learned to speak the pidgin well.

Pidgins may start out as or become trade languages, such as 'Tok Pisin'; but trade languages are often full blown languages in their own right such as Swahili, Persian, or English. Trade languages tend to be "vehicular languages", while pidgins can evolve into the vernacular.

There are identifiable common traits among pidgins. Since a Pidgin strives to be a simple and effective form of communication, the grammar, phonology, etc. are as simple as possible, and usually consist of:

- 1. A Subject-Verb-Object word order in a sentence
- 2. Uncomplicated clausal structure (i.e., no embedded clauses, etc)
- 3. Reduction or elimination of syllable codas
- 4. Reduction of consonant clusters or breaking them with epenthesis
- 5. Basic vowels, like /a/ /e/ /i/ /o/ /u/
- 6. No tones, such as those found in West African and Asian languages
- 7. Use of separate words to indicate tense, usually preceding the verb
- 8. Use of reduplication to represent plurals, superlatives, and other parts of speech that represent the concept being increased
- 9. A lack of morphophonemic variation.

The process of pidginisation is usually assumed to begin when a language is used only for very limited communication between groups who speak different native languages. Sharply restricted in domains of use, it undergoes varying degrees of simplification and admixture. If a new stable variety of the language emerges from this process, it might be described as a pidgin. Admittedly, pidginisation is a complex process of sociolinguistic change.

Pidginisation is a second-language learning process with restricted inputs. That is, pidgins are examples of partially-targeted second-language learning and second-language creation, developing from simpler to more complex systems as communicative requirements become more demanding. Pidgin languages, by definition, have no native speakers – they

are social rather than individual solutions – and hence are characterised by norms of acceptability. There are qualitatively different stages in the development of a pidgin.

It begins by the speaker using his native tongue and re-lexifying first only a few key words. Even these will be thoroughly re-phonologised to accord with substrate sound system and phonotactics and slotted into syntactic surface structures drawn from the substrate. More so, pidginisation is the initial restructuring of a language by a group of learners; this entails structural reduction and substrate transfer.

To sum up, a *pidgin* is a language with no native speakers. It is no one's first language but is a *contact language*. That is, it is the product of a multilingual situation in which those who wish to communicate must find or improvise a simple language system that will enable them to do so. Very often too, that situation is one in which there is an imbalance of power among the languages as the speakers of one language dominate the speakers of the other languages economically and socially. A highly codified language often accompanies that dominant position.

A pidgin is therefore sometimes regarded as a 'reduced' variety of a 'normal' language, i.e., one of the aforementioned dominant languages, with simplification of the grammar and vocabulary of that language, considerable phonological variation, and an admixture of local vocabulary to meet the special needs of the contact group. Holm (1988) defines a pidgin as a reduced language that results from extended contact between groups of people with no language in common. It evolves when they need some means of verbal communication, perhaps for trade, but no group learns the native language of any other group for social reasons that may include lack of trust or of close contact.

The process of pidginization probably requires a situation that involves at least three languages (Whinnom, 1971), one of which is clearly dominant over the others. If only two languages are involved, there is likely to be a

direct struggle for dominance, as between English and French in England after 1066, a struggle won in that case by the socially inferior language (i.e., English) but only after more than two centuries of co-existence.

When three or more languages are involved and one is dominant, the speakers of the two or more that are inferior appear to play a critical role in the development of a pidgin. They must not only speak to those who are in the dominant position, but they must also speak to each other. To do this, they must simplify the dominant language in certain ways, and this process of simplification may or may not have certain universal characteristics. We may argue, therefore, that a pidgin arises from the simplification of a language when that language comes to dominate groups of speakers separated from each other by language differences.

This hypothesis partially explains not only the origin of pidgins in slave societies, in which the slaves were deliberately drawn from a variety of language backgrounds, but also their origin on sea coasts, where a variety of languages might be spoken but the language of trade is a pidgin. It also helps to explain why pidginized varieties of languages are used much more as *lingua francas* by people who cannot speak the corresponding standard languages than they are used between such people and speakers of the standard varieties. For example, Pidgin Chinese English was used mainly by speakers of different Chinese languages and Tok Pisin is today used as a unifying language among speakers of many different languages in Papua New Guinea.

A common view of a pidginized variety of a language, for example, Nigerian Pidgin English, is that it is some kind of 'bad' English, that is, English imperfectly learned and therefore of no possible interest. Consequently, those who speak a pidgin are likely to be regarded as deficient in some way, almost certainly socially and culturally, and sometimes even cognitively. Such a view is quite untenable.

Pidgins are not a kind of 'baby-talk' used among adults because the simplified forms are the best that such people can manage. Pidgins have their own special rules, and, as we will see, very different pidgins have a number of similarities that raise important theoretical issues having to do with their origin. Individual pidgins may be ephemeral, e.g., the pidgin German of the *Gastarbeiters* ('guest-workers') in Germany that developed in the 1970s and 1980s in cities such as Berlin and Frankfurt among workers from countries such as Turkey, Greece, Italy, Spain, and Portugal.

The phenomenon, however, is persistent. About 12 million people in the world are estimated to use one or other of them. Furthermore, they are used for matters which are very important to those concerned, even self-government in Papua New Guinea. They are highly functional in the lives of those who use them and are important for that reason alone if for no other.

#### 3.2.2 Pidgin development process

The creation of a pidgin usually requires prolonged, regular contact between the different language communities and a need to communicate between them. It reveals an absence of a widespread, accessible *interlanguage*. Also, Keith Whinnom (in Hymes (1971)) suggests that pidgins need three languages to form, with one (the superstrate) being clearly dominant over the others. It is often posited that pidgins become creole languages when a generation whose parents speak pidgin to each other teach it to their children as their first language. Creoles can then replace the existing mix of languages to become the native language of a community. However, not all pidgins become creole languages; a pidgin may die out before this phase could occur.

Pidgins and creoles arise independently under different circumstances. Moreover, a pidgin does not necessarily precede a creole nor does a creole evolve from a pidgin. Pidgins emerge among trade colonies and among users who preserve their native vernaculars for their day-to-day interactions. Creoles, meanwhile, developed in settlement colonies in

which speakers of a European language, often indentured servants whose language would be far from the standard in the first place, interacted heavily with non-European slaves, absorbing certain words and features from the slaves' non-European native languages. These servants and slaves would come to use the creole as an everyday vernacular, rather than merely in situations in which contact with a speaker of the superstrate was necessary.

In certain areas of the world, English has been used as a lexifier, that is, a language which is a source of words, for varieties of languages called pidgins. A pidgin, or a contact language, is a mixture of two other languages created usually because of trading purposes between peoples who do not share a common means of communication. English-based pidgins are used in India, Cameroon, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, etc. Such varieties of languages often have limited vocabulary, poorly developed grammar and are used only when other types of communication are impossible.

## LEARNING ACTIVITY 3.2

What is a pidgin?

#### Note:

- a) Write your answer in the space given below.
- b) Check the answer with your academic counsellor.

#### 3.3 CREOLES AND CREOLIZATION

In contrast to a pidgin, a *creole* is often defined as a pidgin that has become the first language of a new generation of speakers. As Aitchison (1994) says, creoles arise when pidgins become mother tongues. A creole, therefore, is a 'normal' language in almost every sense. In Holmes' view (1992) a creole is a pidgin which has expanded in structure and vocabulary to express the range of meanings and serve the range of functions required of a first language.

In practice, it is not always easy to say whether we have a pidgin rather than a creole. Tok Pisin and some of the West African pidgins such as Nigerian Pidgin English probably exist as both pidgins and creoles. They have speakers who use them only as second languages in an expanded form and also speakers for whom they are first languages. Such expanded varieties are often characteristic of urban environments in which there is likely to be considerable contact among speakers of different languages and are sometimes referred to as extended pidgins.

Winford (2003) says that creoles constitute a motley assortment of contact vernaculars with different histories and lines of development, though of course they still have much in common. And, there are no structural characteristics that all creoles share. As well, there are no structural criteria that can distinguish creoles from other types of language.

Just like a pidgin, a creole has no simple relationship to the usually standardized language with which it is associated. If a variety of pidgin English has a complex relationship to Standard English, so Haitian Creole, which is French-based, has a complex relationship to Standard French. The latter relationship is quite different in still another way from the relationship between Jamaican Creole, which is English-based, and Standard English. However, speakers of creoles, like speakers of pidgins, may well feel that they speak something less than normal languages

because of the way they and others view those languages when they compare them with languages such as French and English. The result is that the many millions of people who speak almost nothing but creole languages – the estimates range from a low of 6–7 million to as many as 10–17 million – are likely to feel a great sense of inferiority about their languages. In fact, as mentioned above, it was only very recently that Linguists themselves – those who try to be most objective and least oriented toward making value judgments on linguistic matters – have found creoles worthy of serious scholarly attention.

#### 3.3.1 History of creoles

As implied above, a creole is a stable language that originates seemingly as a nativised pidgin. This understanding of the genesis of creole culminated in notions of the pidgin-creole life cycle. While it is arguable that creoles share more grammatical similarities with each other than with the languages they derive from, no theory for explaining creole phenomenon has been universally accepted. The relationship between pidgins and creoles and their similarities means that the distinction is not clear-cut and the variety of phenomena that arise to create pidgins and creoles are not understood very well. Similarly, the efforts to articulate grammatical features that are exclusive to creoles have proved to be so far unsuccessful.

The concept of creolisation first came into prominence after the European discovery of the Americas to describe the process by which the Old World life forms became indigenous in the New World. Today, creolisation appears in writings on globalisation and post-modernity as a synonym of hybridity and syncretism to portray the mixtures occurring amongst societies in an age of migration and telecommunications. The historical record reminds us that creolisation did not refer centrally to mixture, but just to the adaptive effects of living in a new environment.

The term *creole* comes from French *créole*, from Spanish *criollo*, and from Portuguese *crioulo*, stemming from the verb *criar* ('to breed') from the

Portuguese, or *creare* from Latin ('to produce, create'). The term was coined in the 16<sup>th</sup> century during the great expansion in European maritime power and trade and the establishment of European colonies in the Americas, Africa, and along the coast of South and Southeast Asia, up to the Philippines, China, India, and in Oceania. The term 'creole' was originally applied to people born in the colonies to distinguish them from the upper-class European-born immigrants.

As a consequence of colonial European trade patterns, many creole languages are found in the equatorial belt around the world and in areas with access to the oceans, including the Caribbean as well as the north and east coasts of South America, Western Africa and in the Indian Ocean. Atlantic Creole languages are based on European languages with substrate elements from Africa, Indian Ocean Creoles languages are based on European languages with substrate elements from Malagasy, whereas creoles such as Sango are African-based with African substrate elements from other African languages. There is a heated debate over the extent to which substrate features are significant in the genesis or the description of creole languages.

According to their external history, four types of creoles have been distinguished: plantation creoles, fort creoles, maroon creoles, and creolised pidgins. As to their internal history, there are two preconceived assumptions: Creoles exhibit more internal variability than other languages; Creoles are simpler than other languages. Because of the generally low status of the Creole peoples in the eyes of European colonial powers, creole languages have generally been regarded as degenerate or at best as rudimentary dialects of one of their parent languages. This is the reason why creole has come to be used in opposition to language rather than a qualifier for it.

Another factor that may have contributed to the relative neglect of creole languages in linguistics is that they comfort critics of the 19th century neogrammarian tree model" for the evolution of languages and their law of the regularity of sound change. This controversy of the late 19th century profoundly shaped modern approaches to the comparative method in historical linguistics and in *creolistics*. Since then, linguists have promulgated the idea that creole languages are in no way inferior to other languages.

As a consequence of these social, political, and academic changes, creole languages have experienced a revival in recent decades. They are increasingly and more openly being used in literature and in media, and their community prestige has improved. They are studied by linguists as languages on their own. Many have already been standardised, and are now taught in local schools and universities abroad.

#### 3.3.2 Theories of creoles

There are a variety of theories on the origin of creole languages, all of which attempt to explain the similarities among them, some of which are listed below:

- 1. **Theories focusing on European input:** This monogenetic theory of pidgins and creoles claims a single origin for these languages, deriving them through re-lexification from a West African Pidgin Portuguese of the 17th century and ultimately from the *lingua franca* of the Mediterranean. This theory was originally formulated in the late 19th century and popularised in the late 1950s and early 1960s.
- 2. **Theories focusing on non-European input:** Theories focusing on the substrate, or non-European, languages attribute similarities amongst creoles to the similarities of African substrate languages. These features are often assumed to be transferred from the substrate language to the creole through a process of re-lexification: the substrate language replaces the native lexical items with lexical material from the superstrate language, while retaining the native

grammatical categories. The problem with this explanation is that the postulated substrate languages differ amongst themselves as well as from creoles in meaningful ways.

- 3. Gradualist and developmental hypotheses: One class of creoles might start as pidgins, rudimentary second languages improvised for use between speakers of two or more nonintelligible native languages. It is suggested that that pidgins need three languages to form, with one (the superstrate) being clearly dominant over the others. The lexicon of a creole is usually small and drawn from the vocabularies of its speakers, in varying proportions. Morphological details like word inflections, which usually take years to learn, are omitted; the syntax is kept very simple, usually based on strict word order. In this initial stage, all aspects of the speech – syntax, lexicon, and pronunciation – tend to be quite variable, especially with regard to the speaker's background. If a pidgin manages to be learned by the children of a community as a native language, it may become fixed and acquire a more complex grammar, with fixed phonology, syntax, morphology, and syntactic embedding. Pidgins can become full languages in only a single generation. "Creolisation" is this second stage where the pidgin language develops into a fully developed native language. The vocabulary, too, will contain more and more words according to a rational and stable system.
- 4. Universalist approaches: These stress the intervention of specific general processes during the transmission of language from generation to generation and from speaker to speaker. The process invoked varies: a general tendency towards semantic transparency, first language learning driven by universal process, or general process of discourse organisation. The last decade has seen the emergence of some new approaches to creole studies, namely the question of complexity of creoles and the question of whether creoles are "exceptional" languages.

#### 3.3.3 Levels of creoles

The terms 'substratum' and 'superstratum' are often used to label the source and the target languages of a creole or in the context of second language acquisition. However, the meaning of these terms is reasonably well-defined only in language replacement events, when the native speakers of a certain language (the substrate) are somehow compelled to abandon that language for another language (the superstrate). The outcome of such an event will be that erstwhile speakers of the substrate will be speaking a version of the superstrate, at least in more formal contexts. The substrate may survive as a second language for informal conversation. Its influence on the official speech is usually limited to pronunciation and a modest number of loanwords. The substrate might even disappear altogether without leaving any trace.

However, these terms are not very meaningful where the emerging language is distilled from multiple substrata and a homogeneous superstratum. The substratum-superstratum continuum becomes awkward when multiple superstrata must be assumed, when the substratum cannot be identified, or when the presence or the survival of substratal evidence is inferred from mere typological analogies. However, the facts surrounding the substratum-superstratum opposition cannot be set aside where the substratum as the receding or already replaced source language and the superstratum as the replacing dominant target language can be clearly identified, and where the respective contributions to the resulting compromise language can be weighed in a scientifically meaningful way; and this is so whether the replacement leads to creole genesis or not.

With Atlantic Creoles, superstrate usually refers to European and substrate non-European or African. A post-creole continuum is said to come about in a context of decreolisation where a creole is subject to pressure from its superstrate language. Speakers of the creole feel compelled to conform to their language to superstrate usage introducing large scale variation and hypercorrection.

## LEARNING ACTIVITY 3.3

Explain 'substrata' and 'superstrata' in creoles with examples for each.

#### Note:

- a) Write your answer in the space given below.
- b) Check the answer with your academic counsellor.

#### THE PIDGINIZATION AND CREOLIZATION 3.4 **PROCESSES**

If we look at the actual processes involved in pidginization and creolization, we can see that they are almost diametrically opposed to each other in certain important ways. Pidginization generally involves some kind of 'simplification' of a language, e.g., reduction in morphology (word structure) and syntax (grammatical structure), tolerance of considerable phonological variation (pronunciation), reduction in the number of functions for which the pidgin is used (e.g., you usually do not attempt to write novels in a pidgin), and extensive borrowing of words from local mother tongues. Winford (2003) points out that pidginization is really a complex combination of different processes of change, including reduction

and simplification of input materials, internal innovation, and regularization of structure, with L1 influence also playing a role.

On the other hand, creolization involves expansion of the morphology and syntax, regularization of the phonology, deliberate increase in the number of functions in which the language is used, and development of a rational and stable system for increasing vocabulary. But even though the processes are different, it is still not always clear whether we are talking about a pidgin, an expanded pidgin, or a creole in a certain situation. For example, the terms *Hawaiian Pidgin English* and *Hawaiian Creole English* may be used by even the same creolist (Bickerton, 1977/1983) to describe the same variety.

Similarly, Tok Pisin is sometimes called a pidgin and sometimes a creole. In the absence of evidence for the existence of initial pidgins, Caribbean creoles such as Haitian Creole may also have come into existence through abrupt creolization, new languages created in as little as two generations. Mauritian creole may be another example. Creolists do unite about one important matter. They generally accept that creole formation was primarily a process of second language acquisition in rather unusual circumstances.

Within pidgin and creole studies there is actually some controversy concerning the terms *pidginization* and *creolization*. Winford (1997a) has pointed out that these terms cover a wide variety of phenomena that are not well understood. He suggests *pidgin formation* and *creole formation* as alternatives so that investigators would focus on the specific linguistic inputs and processes that are involved: 'we should be asking ourselves . . . which kinds of linguistic processes and change are common to all . . . contact situations and which are not, and how we can formulate frameworks to account for both the similarities and differences in the types of restructuring found in each case' (p. 138). Thomason (2001) acknowledges that pidgins and creoles arise from contact between and among languages but stresses how varied these types of contact are so that

they may well resist efforts to analyze, explain, or classify the language varieties that emerge.

Recognizing how difficult it is to achieve agreement on what exactly constitutes pidgins and creoles, DeCamp (1977) has offered descriptions of what he regards as clear-cut examples of one of each of these. He says that everyone would agree that the Juba Arabic spoken in the southern Sudan is a pidgin. In most communities, it is not the native language of any of its speakers but functions as an auxiliary interlingua for communication between speakers of the many mutually unintelligible languages spoken in that region. It is a new language, only about a hundred years old. It has a small vocabulary, limited to the needs of trade and other interlingual communication, but this restricted vocabulary is supplemented, whenever the need arises, by using words from the various native languages or from normal Arabic. It has a very simple phonology with few morphophonemic processes. The complicated morphological system of Arabic (which includes, for example, suffixes on the verb to indicate tense, negation, and the person, number, and gender of both the subject and the direct and indirect objects) has been almost entirely eliminated. Such grammatical information is indicated by word order, by separate uninflected pronouns or auxiliaries, or else is simply missing. Yet, Juba Arabic is a relatively stable language in its own right, with its own structure, not just halflearned or baby-talk Arabic. It is easier for an Arabic speaker to learn than for an English speaker, but the Arabic speaker still must learn it as a foreign language; he cannot simply improvise it.

Similarly, everyone agrees that the vernacular language of Haiti is a creole. It is the native language of nearly all Haitians, though standard French is also spoken by some people and is the official language, and one also hears many varieties intermediate between the standard and the creole. Historically it probably evolved from pidginized varieties of French at the time when these began to be acquired as a native language. Because it is a native language and must perform a wide range of communicative and

expressive functions, it has an extensive vocabulary and complex grammatical system comparable to that of a so-called normal language.

In fact, scholars disagree on whether there are any formal characteristics by which we could identify Haitian as a creole if we did not know its history. Although its vocabulary is largely French, the phonology and syntax are so different that most varieties are mutually unintelligible with standard French. In some ways its grammatical structure is more similar to creole Portuguese, creole Spanish, and even to creole English than to standard French, and most creolists object to calling it a dialect of French.

#### 3.4.1 Distribution and characteristics

Pidgin and creole languages are distributed mainly, though not exclusively, in the equatorial belt around the world, usually in places with direct or easy access to the oceans. Consequently, they are found mainly in the Caribbean and around the north and east coasts of South America, around the coasts of Africa, particularly the west coast, and across the Indian and Pacific Oceans. They are fairly uncommon in the more extreme northern and southern areas of the world and in the interiors of continents.

Their distribution appears to be fairly closely related to long-standing patterns of trade, including trade in slaves. Smith (1995) lists 351 pidgins and creoles along with 158 assorted mixed languages. Hancock lists 127 pidgins and creoles, 35 of these are English-based.

The Caribbean area is of particular interest to creolists because of the many varieties of language found there. There are countries or areas that are almost exclusively Spanish-speaking and have no surviving pidgins or creoles as a result of their settlement histories, e.g., the Dominican Republic, Cuba, and Puerto Rico. Others have only English-based creoles, e.g., Antigua, Barbados, Grenada, Jamaica, and Guyana. Still others have only French-based ones, e.g., Martinique, Guadeloupe, St Lucia, and Haiti. Some have both, e.g., Dominica and Trinidad. Aruba, Bonaire, and Curação

have Portuguese-based creoles, and one, the US Virgin Islands, has a virtually extinct Dutch-based creole. The official language in each case can be quite different: it is English in all of the above except Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Haiti, where it is French, and Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao, where it is Dutch. In the southern United States, there are different versions of French in Louisiana (Louisiana Creole, the Cajun French of Acadians from Nova Scotia, and even a very little Standard French), Gullah, and possibly the variety of English now usually referred to as African American Vernacular English.

Suriname, the former Dutch Guiana, a country on the northeast coast of South America, is particularly interesting linguistically. The official language of Suriname is Dutch, but that language is the native tongue of less than 2% of the population. However, two English-based creoles, Sranan and Djuka, are spoken. Sranan, spoken in the coastal areas, is said to be a 'conservative' English creole that bears little resemblance any more to English. Inland, Djuka, the most important of a group of creoles known collectively as 'Bush Negro,' is descended from a pidginized variety of English used by runaway slaves. It is a creole, but it is also found in pidginized varieties among the native Indians of the interior of Suriname for whom it has become a lingua franca. Also found in inland Suriname is another creole, Saramaccan, which is sometimes regarded as Portuguesebased and sometimes as English-based. It seems to have been undergoing a process which we will refer to as relexification, when those who spoke it were cut off from contact with England after England ceded the colony to Holland in 1667.

The language distribution of this whole Caribbean area reflects its social and political history. That is the only way you can explain why a French-based creole is spoken in St. Lucia, which now has English as its official language; why the former island of Hispaniola contains both the Spanish-speaking Dominican Republic and the French-creole-speaking Haiti; why the people of Dutch Curaçao speak Papiamentu, which is a Portuguese-based creole (or perhaps Portuguese with a little Spanish, there being some

controversy on this matter); and why Suriname, officially Dutch-speaking, has two (or perhaps three) English-based creoles.

Other parts of the world are no less complicated linguistically. Sierra Leone has both pidginized and creolized Englishes. The pidgin is West African Pidgin English, widely used as a trading language in West Africa and to that extent indigenous to the country. The creole, Krio, is found in and around the capital, Freetown, and appears to have originated among the slaves who returned to Africa from Jamaica and Britain. It is not a creolized version of West African Pidgin English. In addition, Standard English is spoken in Freetown but with two norms, one deriving from the British Isles and the other locally based. Consequently, it is possible in Freetown to hear even the simplest of propositions expressed in a variety of ways according to who is speaking and the occasion: Standard (British) English, Standard Sierra Leone English, Krio, and West African Pidgin English.

In describing the linguistic characteristics of a pidgin or creole, it is difficult to resist the temptation to compare it with the standard language with which it is associated. In certain circumstances such a comparison may make good sense, as in the linguistic situations in Jamaica and Guyana; in others, however, it seems to make little sense, as in Haiti. In the brief discussion that follows some such comparisons will be made, but they are not meant to be invidious to the pidgin or creole. Each pidgin or creole is a well-organized linguistic system and must be treated as such: you cannot speak Tok Pisin by just 'simplifying' English quite arbitrarily: you will be virtually incomprehensible to those who actually do speak it, nor will you comprehend them.

The sounds of a pidgin or creole are likely to be fewer and less complicated in their possible arrangements than those of the corresponding standard language. For example, Tok Pisin makes use of only five basic vowels and also has fewer consonants than English. No contrast is possible between words like *it* and *eat*, or *pin* and *fin*, or *sip*, *ship*, and *chip*: the necessary vowel and consonant distinctions (contrasts) are not present.

One additional point is worth stressing. A language like English often has complicated phonological relationships between words (or *morphemes*, the small bits of meaning in words) that are closely related, e.g., the first vowel in *type* and *typical*, the *c* in *space* and *spacious*, and the different sounds of the 'plural' ending in *cats*, *dogs*, and *boxes*. The technical term for this is *morphophonemic variation*. Such variation is not found in pidgins, but the development of such variation may be one characteristic of *creolization*, the process by which a pidgin becomes a creole.

In pidgins and creoles, there is likely to be a complete lack of inflection in nouns, pronouns, verbs, and adjectives. Nouns are not marked for number and gender, and verbs lack tense markers. Transitive verbs, that is, verbs that take objects, may, however, be distinguished from intransitive verbs, that is, those that do not take objects, by being marked, e.g., by a final *-im* in Tok Pisin.

Pronouns will not be distinguished for case, so there will be no *I-me*, *he-him* alternations. We should not be surprised that there is such a complete reduction of inflection in pidgins. Differences like *one book-two books*, *he bakes-he baked*, and *big-bigger* are quite expendable. No one seems to have any interest in maintaining them, and alternative ways are found to express the same concepts of number, time, and comparison. In contrast, we should note how important inflectional endings and changes are in a language like English, particularly irregular ones such as *go-went*, *good-better*, and *drink*, *drank*, *drunk*. They are used as one of the indicators of regional and social origin. Which set of inflections you acquire is almost entirely an accident of birth, but if it is not the socially preferred set the accident can prove to be a costly one. Pidgins do comfortably without inflections, but it is not surprising that some people view their absence as a sign of deficiency and inferiority in both languages and speakers in much the same way as they view acquisition of a set which is dispreferred.

Syntactically, sentences are likely to be uncomplicated in clausal structure. The development of embedded clauses, e.g., of relative clauses, is one characteristic of the process of creolization: pidgins do not have such embedding. The use of particles, that is, usually small isolated words, is also quite frequent.

Negation may be achieved through use of a simple negative particle *no* in the English-based Krio, e.g., *i no tu had* ('It's not too hard') and *pa* in the French-based Seychelles Creole, e.g., *i pa tro difisil* ('It's not too difficult'). One particularly interesting feature is the use of pre-verbal particles to show that an action is continuing, i.e., to show 'continuous aspect.' What we can see from even these few examples is that creoles associated with quite different standard languages apparently use identical syntactic devices. This phenomenon has intrigued many creolists and, as we will see in the following section, has led to the formulation of certain hypotheses about the origins of pidgins and creoles.

The vocabulary of a pidgin or a creole has a great many similarities to that of the standard language with which it is associated. However, it will be much more limited, and phonological and morphological simplification often leads to words assuming somewhat different shapes. As noted above in the example of *sip* and *sipsip*, it is sometimes necessary to use this *reduplicative* pattern to avoid possible confusion or to express certain concepts, e.g., 'repetition' or 'intensification.'

Consequently, we find pairs like *talk* ('talk') and *talktalk* ('chatter'), *dry* ('dry') and *drydry* ('unpalatable'), *look* ('look') and *looklook* ('stare'), *cry* ('cry') and *crycry* ('cry continually'), *pis* ('peace') and *pispis* ('urinate'), and *san* ('sun') and *sansan* ('sand'). In the Caribbean varieties, there is also often a noticeable African element in the vocabulary (e.g., see Turner, 1949, on Gullah). Still another source of vocabulary will be innovation. A good example from Winford (2003 is 'as (< Engl. *arse*) means not just

"buttock," but also "cause, foundation." Similarly, *bel* means not just "belly," but also "seat of the emotions".'

#### **3.4.2 Origins**

Linguists who have studied pidgins and creoles have long been intrigued by the similarities they have found among them. Pidgins from very different parts of the world exhibit remarkable similarities in structure even when the standard languages with which they are associated are quite different. Furthermore, pidgins and creoles based on the same standard language but found in places far distant from one another may have a high degree of mutual intelligibility, e.g., the various pidginized and creolized varieties of French found geographically as far apart as the Caribbean, the Indian Ocean, and the South Pacific. How can we account for these similarities? One theory about the origins of pidgins is easily dismissed. This is the idea that pidgins arise because the people, among whom they are found, lack the ability to learn the standard languages with which the pidgins are associated.

Such a view may sometimes be associated with another one, that European languages are somehow 'better' than others and that many people speak 'primitive' languages, i.e., languages that are 'deficient' in certain respects. Such deficiencies may then be cited as evidence that the people themselves are inferior. We must note that linguists have been unable to locate a single such 'primitive language,' that claims about associated intellectual deficiencies are largely 'racist,' and that this theory about the origins of pidgins ignores many important facts.

There is no evidence either for any 'foreigner-talk' or 'baby-talk' theory (Bloomfield, 1933) for the origin of pidgins and creoles, i.e., that they result from Europeans deliberately simplifying their languages in order to communicate with others. According to this theory, these simplified forms then serve to provide pidgins with their basic structures and vocabularies. There are too many structural similarities among pidgins and creoles

associated with very different European languages to make such a theory of origin plausible, e.g., between the English-based creole of Jamaica and the French-based one of Haiti. If there is evidence of simplification, it is evidence of some very different process at work than any kind of 'talking down,' 'baby-talk,' or 'mimicry' can explain.

Moreover, pidgins are far less frequently used between Europeans and non-Europeans than among non-Europeans. In fact, many Europeans who must deal regularly with pidginized varieties of their languages speak them very badly indeed, failing to understand some of the basic structural characteristics of the pidgins. Finally, there is plenty of evidence that it is Europeans who learn the pidgins from non-Europeans rather than the opposite, although the use of so much European vocabulary may tend to conceal that fact.

One theory, the theory of *polygenesis*, is that pidgins and creoles have a variety of origins; any similarities among them arise from the shared circumstances of their origins. For example, speakers of English have had to make themselves understood for the purposes of trade and those trading with them have had to be understood. Consequently, certain simplified forms of English have developed independently in a number of places, giving rise to varieties of pidgin English. Because in every case the target language is English, these local varieties will have certain similarities. In this view a 'pidgin X' or 'creolized Y' is a variety of X or Y, much as Cockney English is a variety of English. Then, more generally, since English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese are really not so different – they are all Indo-European languages – we might expect similarities.

We can go even further to claim that a 'simplification' process for any language would produce much the same results everywhere: a simpler set of sounds, no inflections, basic word order patterns, short uncomplicated utterances, and so on. Various other explanations have been offered for the resulting similarities including the similar social contexts of their origin,

the similar communicative needs of those who use them, and, most plausible of all, a shared *substratum*.

This last idea seems particularly appropriate to explain many similarities among the pidgins and creoles in the Atlantic Ocean and Indian Ocean on the one hand, and Pacific Ocean pidgins and creoles on the other. The former are said to have an African substrate and the latter an Oceanic one, i.e., each contains certain language characteristics of the native ancestral languages of their speakers. In this view, Atlantic pidgins and creoles retain certain characteristics of ancestral African languages. African slaves were often multilingual, spoke languages of similar structure but different vocabulary, and tended to treat English and French, and to a lesser extent Portuguese, in the same way. Therefore, the pidgins and creoles are European-language-based and were freshly created in different places.

We can contrast such *polygenetic* views with *monogenetic* ones. One such view of the similarities among Atlantic pidgins and creoles requires us to examine the very beginnings of the pidginization process. For example, according to McWhorter (1995/2000), their similarities can be accounted for, if we look back to the beginnings of the slave trade and the existence of English and French slave forts on the West African Coast. In these forts, contact languages developed, e.g., West African Pidgin Portuguese. These contact languages provided the bases for most of the pidgins and creoles that later developed across the Atlantic. This supports the Afrogenesis hypothesis concerning the origins of pidgins and creoles. This view of the development of pidgins and creoles is a monogenetic view, claiming as it does that a single source accounts for the perceived similarities among the varieties we find.

Another variant of such a monogenetic theory is that the similarities among pidgins and creoles might be attributable to a common origin in the language of sailors in some kind of nautical jargon. It is a well-known fact that the crews of ships were – and sometimes still are – often drawn from a variety of sources. For example, Nelson's flagship *Victory* is said to have

been crewed by sailors of fourteen different nationalities. A common shipboard *lingua franca*, or nautical jargon, developed among the members of the sailing community. In this view, it was that *lingua franca*, rather than a pidginized variety of a standard language, that was carried along the shipping routes. However, the evidence for this theory is weak, consisting of a few sea-based terms in different pidgins. Moreover, it almost completely ignores the more serious structural similarities among existing pidgins and creoles, similarities that seem to require a more profound explanation. The theory of *relexification* is an attempt to offer such an explanation.

#### 3.4.3 Theory of re-lexification

According to the theory of *re-lexification*, all the present European-language-based pidgins and creoles derive from a single source, a *lingua franca* called Sabir used in the Mediterranean in the Middle Ages. In the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Portuguese *re-lexified* this language; that is, they introduced their own vocabulary into its grammatical structure, so that a Portuguese-based pidgin came into widespread use as a trade language. Later, this pidgin was in turn re-lexified into pidginized French, English, and Spanish. In each case, the underlying grammatical structure remained largely unaffected, but a massive shift occurred in vocabulary as replacement words were imported from the *lexifier language* to produce a conspicuous *superstratum*. It is also argued that Portuguese relics still remain after re-lexification, e.g., *savvy* and *piccaninny* (from Portuguese *saber*, 'know,' and *pequeño*, 'little'), in English-based creoles.

Such a theory attempts to provide a serious explanation for the fact that pidgins and creoles associated with different standard languages have certain common structural features but quite different vocabularies. In this view, a pidgin English is therefore an Anglicized version of the original pidgin and a pidgin French is a Gallicized version. The theory leads creolists such as Todd (1990) to go so far as to use a version of the classical

comparative method of reconstruction in an attempt to show how various pidgins and creoles have descended from a Portuguese-based ancestor.

Lefebvre (1998), after more than twenty years of study of Haitian Creole, concludes that creole languages are created by adult speakers with a mature lexicon. Speakers reanalyze the resulting language in a mental process whereby a particular form which signals one lexical entry becomes the signal of another lexical entry. In other words relexification is the starting point of a larger process. There is some good evidence that relexification has occurred. If we look at Saramaccan, it seems to be a pidgin in the process of relexification from Portuguese to English. It was 'frozen' in this intermediate, transitional stage when its speakers were cut off from England in 1667 when the colony became a Dutch possession.

There is also evidence that in parts of West Africa such kinds of replacement do occur, that people know the vocabularies of different languages but use a kind of common grammar in speaking them so that when they come across a new language they employ the 'new' vocabulary in the 'old' grammatical framework and manage to make themselves understood.

#### Language bioprogram hypothesis

One of the severest condemnations of re-lexification comes from Bickerton (1977), who considers that re-lexification asks us to accept too many improbabilities and argues that:

We are asked to believe that an original contact language could be disseminated round the entire tropical zone, to peoples of widely differing language background, and still preserve a virtually complete identity in its grammatical structure wherever it took root, despite considerable changes in its phonology and virtually complete changes in its lexicon.

He proffers Language Bioprogram hypothesis as an alternative theory (1981) to account for the similarities we find in pidgins and creoles. Bickerton (1983) claims that only this hypothesis adequately explains the similarities among creoles: universal principles of first language acquisition are involved. Jespersen (1922) had previously pointed out certain similarities between pidgins and creoles and children's language. Bickerton argues that it is better to focus on what pidgins and creoles *have* and *do* than on what they *lack*.

Typically, creoles are developed by children who find themselves born into a multilingual environment in which the most important language for peer contact is a pidgin. Children are compelled to develop that language because each child has a bio-program to develop a full language. Children use this bio-program in the same way wherever they happen to be and the consequence is that the grammatical structures of creoles are more similar to one another than they are to the structures of any other language. Bickerton further develops this thesis, claiming that children have certain innate language abilities that they are actually forced to suppress as they learn languages like English and French.

#### 3.4.4 From pidgin to creole

Whatever their origins, it is generally acknowledged that a pidgin is almost always involved in the earliest stage of a creole. The pidgin comes about from the need to communicate, particularly when those who need to communicate speak a variety of languages and the speakers of the 'target' language are 'superior' in some sense and perhaps transient too. Thus, pidginization seems to have happened – and seems still to happen – repeatedly, for it is one of the basic means by which linguistic contact is made among speakers of different languages who find themselves in an asymmetrical social relationship, i.e., one in which there is a serious imbalance of power. The fact that is especially interesting is how similar the results are from place to place and from time to time.

Not every pidgin eventually becomes a creole, i.e., undergoes the process of creolization. In fact, very few do. Most pidgins are lingua francas, existing to meet temporary local needs. They are spoken by people who use another language or other languages to serve most of their needs and the needs of their children. If a pidgin is no longer needed, it dies out. It may also be the case that the pidgin in a particular area must constantly be 'reinvented'; there is no reason to believe, for example, that either Cameroonian Pidgin English or Hawaiian Pidgin English have had uninterrupted histories. Creolization occurs only when a pidgin for some reason becomes the variety of language that children must use in situations in which use of a 'full' language is effectively denied them. A creole is the native language of some of its speakers.

We can see how this must have happened in Haiti when French was effectively denied to the masses and the African languages brought by the slaves fell into disuse. We can also see how, while many of the guest workers in Germany developed pidginized varieties of German to communicate, when necessary, with one another, their children did not creolize these varieties but, with varying success, acquired Standard German, since they had to go to school and be educated in German. A full language was available to them so they had no need for a creolized Deutsch.

The example of Tok Pisin is useful in considering how a pidgin expands and develops into a creole. It was not until the 1960s that the pidgin was nativized, i.e., children began to acquire it as a first language, and, therefore, becoming for them a creole, while remaining an extended pidgin for previous generations. So far as functions are concerned, Tok Pisin has become symbolic of a new culture; it is now used in many entirely new domains, e.g., government, religion, agriculture, and aviation; it is employed in a variety of media; and it is supplanting the vernaculars and even English in many areas.

Aitchison (1991) points out the following four kinds of change in Tok Pisin:

- People speak creoles faster than pidgins and they do not speak them word by word. Consequently, processes of assimilation and reduction can be seen at work in Tok Pisin: ma bilong mi ('my husband') becomes mamblomi.
- 2. The expansion of vocabulary resources resulting in new shorter words, e.g., *paitman* ('fighter') exists alongside *man bilong pait* ('man of fight'). There is also much borrowing of technical vocabulary from English.
- 3. The development of a tense system in verbs. *Bin* is used as a past time marker and *bai*, from *baimbai* ('by and by'), as a future time marker.
- 4. Increased sentence complexity. Some speakers are now able to construct relative clauses because *we* (from 'where') is developing as an introductory marker. In ways such as these, the original pidgin is quickly developing into a fully fledged language, which we call a creole only because we know its origin.

This last point is important. It is only because we know the origins of creoles that we know they are creoles. Hall (1966) has observed that all the evidence available so far indicates that the type of linguistic change and the mechanisms involved – sound-change, analogy, borrowing of various kinds – are the same for pidgins and creoles as they are for all other languages.

The only difference lies in the rate of change – far faster for a pidgin (because of the drastic reduction in structure and lexicon) than for most languages. When a pidgin has become nativized, the history of the resultant creole is, in essence, similar to that of any other language. Whereas a pidgin is identifiable at any given time by both linguistic and social criteria, a creole is identifiable only by historical criteria, that is, if we know that it has arisen out of a pidgin. There are no structural criteria which, in themselves, will identify a creole as such, in the absence of historical evidence. Hall adds that the kinds of changes we associate with

creolization normally take thousands of years in languages for which we have good historical data.

Recent intensive study of pidgins and creoles has revealed how quickly such languages can and do change. Pidginization can occur almost overnight. Re-lexification also seems to be a rapid process. Creolization can take as little as two generations. The particular combination of language and social contact that gives rise to pidgins and creoles seems also to have occurred frequently in the history of the human species.

What this suggests is that many now traditional views about how languages change may need revision. Such change may not be slow and regular at all, or it may be so only in the absence of certain kinds of language contact. Since contact situations appear to hasten change, the study of pidgins and creoles offers important clues to the kinds of changes that you might seek to discover.

#### 3.4.5 Creole continuum

Because a creole can be related to some other dominant, or superordinate, language a *creole continuum* can arise. For example, an English-based creole can develop a number of varieties when it is in contact with Standard English. As the range of these varieties increases, Standard English may more and more influence them so that some varieties will come to resemble Standard English. This process has become known as *decreolization*. However, Winford (1997b) points out that there are various kinds of continua and each creole continuum is unique in its own way. Consequently, much research is still needed to discover how the varieties arise and relate to one another.

In discussing the creole continuum that exists in Guyanese English, Bickerton (1975) has proposed a number of terms that may be used to refer to its different parts. He uses the term *acrolect* to refer to educated Guyanese English, a variety which really has very few differences from

other varieties of Standard English. He uses the term *basilect* to refer to the variety at the other extreme of the continuum, the variety that would be least comprehensible to a speaker of the standard, perhaps even incomprehensible. *Mesolects* are intermediate varieties. However, these are not discrete entities, for one important characteristic of these intermediate mesolects is that they blend into one another to fill the 'space' between the acrolect and the basilect. As we might expect, there is considerable social stratification involved in such a situation.

Writing of the continuum that exists in Jamaica, DeCamp (1977) has observed that particular speakers control a span of the spectrum, not just one discrete level within it. He says that the breadth of the span depends on the breadth of the speaker's social activities: A labor leader, for example, can command a greater span of varieties than can a sheltered housewife of suburban middle class. A housewife may make a limited adjustment downward on the continuum in order to communicate with a market woman, and the market woman may adjust upward when she talks to the housewife.

Each of them may then believe that she is speaking the other's language, for the myth persists in Jamaica that there are only two varieties of language – Standard English and the dialect – but the fact is that the housewife's broadest dialect may be closer to the standard end of the spectrum than is the market woman's 'standard.' However, Jamaicans do not perceive the existence of a continuum. Instead, they perceive what they say and hear only in relation to the two ends and make any judgments and adjustments in terms of the two extremes, Standard English or 'the dialect,' 'patois,' or 'Quashie,' as it is sometimes referred to. Patrick (1999) points out that at least in Kingston the continuum is much more complicated: multi-dimensional rather than uni-dimensional.

The idea of a simple continuum may therefore be little more than a neat theoretical concept, since the variation found in everyday language use requires taking into consideration many other explanatory factors. A continuum can arise only if the two extreme varieties are the varieties of the same language, as with standard X (language) and creolized X (language), e.g., Standard English and Jamaican Creole English.

It is also important to note that not only Patrick (1999) but also others such as Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985) reject the idea of the continuum as being altogether too simplistic. They claim that it results from simplifying and manipulating data rather than trying to confront the evidence in all its complexity. It is too simplistic to explain the linguistic choices that speakers make. It is essentially a uni-dimensional approach to a situation in which all the factors suggest that only a multi-dimensional approach can offer an appropriate account of speakers' linguistic behavior. There is considerable merit to this view.

According to theorists such as Rickford (1977) and Dillard (1972), the process of decreolization can also be observed in the United States in what has happened in the linguistic history of the black slave population that was brought to work the cotton plantations. The original slaves brought with them a number of West African languages, but many must also have arrived with some knowledge of Portuguese-based or English-based pidgins, the trading lingua francas of the African coast. Slave owners deliberately chose slaves from different language backgrounds to discourage rebellion. Such circumstances fostered the development of English-based pidgins and the process of creolization.

#### **SUMMARY**

In this Unit, we discussed the concepts of pidgin and creole. We said that though pidgins and creoles were traditionally considered 'marginal languages', they made rich linguistic contributions in the context of sociolinguistics. We began the Unit by explaining how *lingua francas* came into existence. Subsequently, we made an elaborate discussion on pidgins and creoles as well as the pidginization and creolization processes. We explained that when two groups of people, speaking different languages,

come into contact with one another, for purposes of communication they tend to a language variety with typically reduced grammar and vocabulary but cannot be associated with either party and such a language variety is a pidgin. We then discussed how a creole would get formed as a result of the constant use of a pidgin over a certain period of time. We said that due to the continuous use of pidgin over a period of time, it tended to get expanded with a range of structure, syntax, vocabulary, semantics, etc., and tended to serve the range of functions required of a first language. The language variety that became the mother tongue of a new generation of speakers is a creole. Having explained the pidgins and creoles, we discussed in details the processes involved in pidginization and creolization. We closed the Unit by touching upon various aspects of post-creolization including re-lexification and creole continuum.

# Unit 4

# **Codes: Switching and Mixing**

#### **STRUCTURE**

Overview

Learning objectives

- 4.1 Diglossic and Codes
  - 4.1.1 Diglossic
  - 4.1.2 Codes
- 4.2 What is Code-Switching/Mixing?
  - 4.2.1 Concepts
  - 4.2.2 Differences
  - 4.2.3 Country practices
- 4.3 Code-Switching: Situational and Metaphorical
  - 4.3.1 Situational
  - 4.3.2 Metaphorical
  - 4.3.3 Resistance
- 4.4 Multilingualism and Bilingualism
  - 4.4.1 Multilingualism
  - 4.4.2 Bilingualism

#### **Summary**

#### **OVERVIEW**

Our main focus in this Unit is on codes and code-switching and codemixing. Accordingly, we will begin by explaining such concepts as diglossic and codes. This will provide a context for the discussion that follows. We will take up for discussion the concepts of code-switching and code-mixing and the differences between the two. We will provide you with country examples where code-switching/mixing is prevalent primarily due to their multi-ethnic or multi-linguistic and/or immigrant nature. While we touch upon the two important ways by which code-switching happens, situational and metaphorical, we will also bring to the fore the resistance to code-switching as well. We will bring the Unit to a close by discussing multilingualism and bilingualism.

#### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

After completing the Unit, you should be able to:

- Give the meanings of diglossic and codes.
- Explain code-switching and code-mixing.
- Discuss situational and metaphorical code-switching.
- Analyse the code-switching process in the multilingual and bilingual speech communities.

#### 4.1 DIGLOSSIC AND CODES

A *diglossic* situation exists in a society, when it has two distinct codes which show clear functional separation; that is, one code is employed in one set of circumstances and the other in an entirely different set. Ferguson (1959) has defined diglossia as a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards), there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, either of an earlier period or in another speech community, which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation. In Sub-sections 4.1.1 and 4.1.2, we will discuss the

concept of diglossic and code, a neutral term representing pidgin, creole, etc., respectively.

#### 4.1.1 Diglossic

A diglossic situation is one in which the creole and the standard language lack continuity so far as functions are concerned, and that functional discontinuity is generally strongly supported by severe social stratification. For example, Haitian Creole and Standard French differ almost as much as two quite unrelated languages. There are no intermediate varieties in Haiti, and the two are kept socially and functionally apart. In Haiti, one possible solution to such a diglossic situation would seem to be the elevation of the creole to 'full' language status through the process of standardization. However, the socially and politically elite in Haiti, even though they themselves use Haitian Creole in certain circumstances, officially disdain any language other than Standard French and the general populace find little or no encouragement for thinking well of the creole. On the other hand, Afrikaans, of possible creole origin, has been developed into a 'full' language in South Africa, Bahasa Indonesia has been developed out of certain varieties of Malay, and Tok Pisin is now used in Papua New Guinea as a unifying language.

The different linguistic situations create different social and educational problems for speakers of the pidgins and creoles. In a *diglossic* situation such as in Haiti, there are traditional power relationships exemplified in the distributions of the two varieties of language, e.g., Haitian Creole and the local variety of French. Everyone speaks the former, but those at the 'upper' levels of Haitian society also speak French. There are also varieties of the creole, the *kreyòl fransize* ('French creole') or *kreyòl swa* ('smooth creole') of the educated, urban, bilingual upper class and the *gwo kreyòl* ('vulgar creole') or *kreyòl rèk* ('rough creole') of the rest of the people. The creole is associated with ignorance, poverty, and inferiority, even by those

who speak it, but at the same time it is a marker of Haitian solidarity: it is what makes Haitians distinctively Haitians.

French, though quite alien to well over three-quarters of the population, is the preferred language of education and it also provides access to the outside world (although recently English has been making inroads). Those who have knowledge of French regard it as the language of culture even though, by the standards of Continental French, the Haitian variety of French tends to be grandiose, flowery and archaic. The result, predictably, is that little or no progress is made in Haiti in solving pressing social and educational problems. Many of these are directly related to linguistic matters so it is not surprising that they should be as severe as they are, and it was not until 1961 that the creole gained any limited official recognition at all. Only in 1979, it became the medium of instruction for the first four years of schooling.

Jamaica might appear to offer more hope that a unified language will evolve. However, the subtle gradations that exist in a continuum can also be put to use to classify people. The people who use the two ends of the Jamaican continuum are almost as far apart socially as those Haitians who speak only Haitian Creole are from those who are completely bilingual in the creole and French. Some varieties of Jamaican English are clearly felt to be 'superior' and others clearly 'inferior,' so the particular span of varieties a Jamaican uses serves as a clear social class marker.

Wassink's study (1999) of speakers from the semi-rural community of Gordon Town outside Kingston, Jamaica, revealed that some of the negative attitudes towards the existence of a continuum may be weakening. There is still considerable ambivalence about what locals call the *patois*: for example, respondents were more willing to hear it used by others than they were to use it themselves. Young people were also more accepting than old.

This problem is no longer unique to Jamaica. In recent decades, there has been considerable emigration from Jamaica (and from other countries in which the same kind of continuum is normal), so that a further dimension has been added to the continuum: a new standard is superposed on the previous Jamaican one, e.g., British English or Canadian English. How best to deal with the social and educational factors associated with a continuum is no longer a problem unique to certain places where creoles have developed, but is now a problem for educators in cities like London, Toronto, and New York.

Edwards (1986) and Hewitt (1986, 1989) have pointed out how in England black youths of West Indian origin not only learn the local variety of English but often too a particular variety of Caribbean English that differs from that of their parents. Edwards says that they deliberately *re-creolize* the English they use in an attempt to assert their ethnic identity and solidarity because of the social situation in which they find themselves. We also hear how some young British African Caribbeans create London Jamaican English forms that are clearly different from Jamaican Jamaican English (JJE) forms, e.g., *fru* for *through* (JJE *tru*). For these youngsters, this type of creole has covert prestige with its images of solidarity, Black Britishness, and distinctiveness from other varieties of English.

Ferguson identifies four language situations which show the major characteristics of the diglossic phenomenon: Arabic, Swiss German, Haitian (French and Creole), and Greek. In each situation, there is a 'high' variety (H) of language and a 'low' variety (L). Each variety has its own specialized functions, and each is viewed differently by those who are aware of both.

We do not use an H variety in circumstances calling for an L variety, e.g., for addressing a servant; nor do you usually use an L variety when an H is called for, e.g., for writing a 'serious' work of literature. You may indeed do the latter, but it may be a risky endeavour; it is the kind of thing that

Chaucer did for the English of his day, and it requires a certain willingness, on the part of both the writer and others, to break away from a diglossic situation by extending the L variety into functions normally associated only with the H. For about three centuries, after the Norman Conquest of 1066, English and Norman French coexisted in England in a diglossic situation with Norman French the H variety and English the L. However, gradually the L variety assumed more and more functions associated with the H, so that by Chaucer's time, it had become possible to use the L variety for a major literary work.

While the H variety is the prestigious, powerful variety; the L variety lacks prestige and power. In fact, there may be so little prestige attached to the L variety that people may even deny that they know it although they may be observed to use it far more frequently than the H variety. Diglossia is a widespread phenomenon in the world, well attested in both space (e.g., varieties of Tamil in the south of India) and time (e.g., Latin in Europe in the Middle Ages).

#### **4.1.2 Codes**

It is possible to refer to a language or a variety of a language as a *code*. The term is useful because it is neutral. Terms like *dialect*, *language*, *style*, *standard language*, *pidgin* and *creole* are inclined to arouse emotions. In contrast, the 'neutral' term *code*, taken from information theory, can be used to refer to any kind of system that two or more people employ for communication. It can actually be used for a system used by a single person, as when someone devises a private code to protect certain secrets. All of the above, then, are codes by this, admittedly loose, definition. What is of interest is the factors that govern the choice of a particular code on a particular occasion.

Why do people choose to use one code rather than another, what brings about shifts from one code to another, and why do they occasionally prefer to use a code formed from two other codes by switching back and forth between the two or even mixing them? Such questions as these assume that there are indeed few single-code speakers; people are nearly always faced with choosing an appropriate code when they speak. Very young children may be exceptions, as many learners of a new language (for a while at least) and the victims of certain pathological conditions.

In general, however, when you open your mouth, you must choose a particular language, dialect, style, register, or variety – that is, a particular code. You cannot avoid doing so. Moreover, you can and will shift, as the need arises, from one code to another. Within each code there will also be the possibility of choices not all of which will have the same import because some will be more marked than others, i.e., will be more significant. The various choices will have different social meanings. What are some of the factors that influence the choices you make?

We will look mainly at the phenomenon of *code-switching* in bilingual and multilingual situations. However, many of the issues that we will see there will also arise with those codes which can be called sub-varieties of a single language, e.g., dialects, styles and registers. In particular, we will examine the so-called *diglossic* situation in which clear functional differences between the codes govern the choice.

## LEARNING ACTIVITY 4.1

Explain the concept of diglossic.

#### Note:

- a) Write your answer in the space given below.
- b) Check the answer with your academic counsellor.

#### 4.2 WHAT IS CODE-SWITCHING?

The particular dialect or language that a person chooses to use on any occasion is a code, i.e., a system used for communication between two or more parties. However, it is unusual for a speaker to have command of, or use, only one such code or system. Command of only a single variety of language — be it a dialect, style, or register — would appear to be an extremely rare phenomenon, one likely to occasion comment. Most speakers command several varieties of any language they speak, and bilingualism, even multilingualism, is the norm for many people throughout the world rather than unilingualism.

People, then, are usually required to select a particular code whenever they choose to speak, and they may also decide to switch from one code to another or to mix codes even within, sometimes, very short utterances and thereby create a new code in a process known as *code-switching*. Code-switching (also called code-mixing) can occur in conversation between speakers' turns or within a single speaker's turn. In the latter case, it can occur between sentences (inter-sententially) or within a single sentence (intra-sententially).

Code-switching can arise from individual choice or be used as a major identity marker for a group of speakers who must deal with more than one language in their common pursuits. As Gal (1988) says, "codeswitching is a conversational strategy used to establish, cross or destroy group boundaries; to create, evoke or change interpersonal relations with their rights and obligations."

Let us now look more closely at this phenomenon.

Now, what happens when people from a multilingual society, i.e., people who are themselves multilingual, meet in a 'foreign' setting? What language or languages do they use?

We will address this question by referring to a few examples.

• **Singapore:** In a multilingual country like Singapore, the ability to shift from one language to another is accepted as quite normal. Singapore has four official languages: English, the Mandarin variety of Chinese, Tamil, and Malay, which is also the national language. However, the majority of its population is the native speakers of Hokkien, another variety of Chinese, while the national policy promotes English as a trade language; Mandarin as the international 'Chinese' language, Malay as the language of the region, and Tamil as the language of one of the important ethnic groups in the Republic.

What this means for a 'typical' Chinese child growing up in Singapore is that he or she is likely to speak Hokkien with parents and informal Singapore English with siblings. Conversation with friends will be in Hokkien or informal Singapore English. The languages of education will be the formal variety of Singapore English and Mandarin. Any religious practices will be conducted in the formal variety of Singapore English if the family is Christian, but in Hokkien, if Buddhist or Taoist. The language of government employment will be formal Singapore English but some Mandarin will be used from time to time; however, shopping will be carried on in Hokkien, informal Singapore English, and the 'bazaar' variety of Malay used throughout the region. Thus, the linguistic situation in Singapore offers those who live there a wide choice among languages, with the actual choice made on a particular occasion determined by the kinds of factors just mentioned.

• Indonesia: Tanner (1967) reports on the linguistic usage of a small group of Indonesian graduate students and their families living in the United States. Among them, these students, Tanner reports, know nine different languages, with nearly everyone knowing Indonesian (Bahasa Indonesia), Javanese, Dutch and English. In other words, they tend to discuss their academic work in English but use Indonesian for most

other common activities. Unlike Javanese, "Indonesian . . . , whether the official or the daily variety, is regarded as a neutral, democratic language. A speaker of Indonesian need not commit himself to any particular social identity, nor need he impute one to those with whom he converses' (p. 134). The students also use Dutch, but mainly as a resource, e.g., for vocabulary, or because of the place it necessarily holds in certain fields of study, e.g., Indonesian studies. Tanner further adds that local languages like Javanese tend to be used only with acquaintances when fine shades of respect or distance are necessary, particularly when in the presence of important older people.

• **Kenya**: Situations such as those just described are not uncommon. In Kenya, local languages, Swahili and English all find use and choosing the right language to use on a particular occasion can be quite a delicate matter. Whiteley (1984) describes the kind of situation that can occur between a member of the public and members of the government bureaucracy: A man wishing to see a government officer about renewing a licence may state his request to the girl typist in Swahili as a suitably neutral language if he does not know her. To start off in English would be unfortunate if she did not know it, and his gaining access to authority reasonably quickly depends on her goodwill!

She may reply in Swahili, if she knows it as well as he does and wishes to be co-operative; or in English, if she is busy and not anxious to be disturbed; or in the local language, if she recognises him and wishes to reduce the level of formality. If he, in return, knows little English, he may be put off at her use of it and decide to come back later; or, if he knows it well, he may demonstrate his importance by insisting on an early interview and gain his objective at the expense of the typist's goodwill. The interview with the officer may well follow a similar pattern, being shaped, on the one hand, by the total repertoire mutually available, and on the other by their respective positions in relation to the issue involved.

• Canada: Heller (1982) observes that language plays a symbolic role in our lives, and when there is a choice of languages, the actual choice may be very important, particularly when there is a concurrent shift in the relationship between the languages, as is occurring in Montreal between English and French.

In such circumstances, as Heller observes, 'negotiation in conversation is a playing out of a negotiation for position in the community at large'. Heller studied the uses of the two languages in a Montreal hospital during the summer of 1977. Which language was used varied as circumstances changed. What is particularly interesting is that the pattern that has evolved of asking which language someone wishes to use in a public service encounter ('English or French, Anglais ou Français?') is not very effective. The reason is that too many other factors are involved to make the choice that simple: the negotiation of language has to do with judgments of personal treatment, that is, how one expects to be treated in such a situation. But such judgments are dependent upon social knowledge, knowledge about group relations and boundaries and ways of signalling them, and knowledge about other social differences, e.g., status differences.

We can see still other examples of how a speaker may deliberately choose to use a specific language to assert some kind of 'right.' A bilingual (in French and English) French Canadian may insist on using French to an official of the federal government outside Quebec, a bilingual (Catalan and Spanish) resident of Barcelona may insist on using Catalan, a bilingual (Welsh and English) resident of Wales may insist on using Welsh, and so on. In these cases code choice becomes a form of political expression, a move either to resist some other power, or to gain power, or to express solidarity.

The situations discussed above make us to ask an important question: what brings a speaker to choose variety X of a language A rather than

variety Y, or even language A rather than language B. What might cause a speaker to switch from variety X to variety Y or from language A to language B?

One could offer a number of answers, including solidarity, accommodation to listeners, choice of topic, and perceived social and cultural distance. In other words, the motivation of the speaker is an important consideration in the choice. Moreover, such motivation need not be at all conscious, for, apparently, many speakers are not aware that they have used one particular variety of a language rather than another or sometimes even that they have switched languages either between or within utterances.

Code-mixing is the change of one language to another within the same utterance or in the same oral/written text. It is a common phenomenon in societies in which two or more languages are used. Studies of code-mixing enhance our understanding of the nature, processes and constraints of language and of the relationship between language use and individual values, communicative strategies, language attitudes and functions within particular socio-cultural contexts.

Code-switching cannot occur between a functional head, e.g., a determiner or an inflection, and its complement (i.e., a sentence, noun phrase or verb phrase). Linguists use different names for various types of switching such as the following:

- **Inter-sentential switching**: This refers to code-switching outside the sentence or clause level, for example, at sentence or clause boundaries.
- **Intra-sentential switching**: This refers to code-switching within a sentence or clause.
- **Tag-switching**: This refers to code-switching a tag phrase or word from language B into language A. This is a common intra-sentential switch.
- **Intra-word switching**: This refers to code-switching within a word itself, such as at a morpheme boundary.

Immigrants to a country would, while learning the new language, would switch back and forth between that new language and their mother tongue, until they are quite familiar with the former.

### LEARNING ACTIVITY 4.2

Write a note on code-switching.

#### Note:

- a) Write your answer in the space given below.
- b) Check the answer with your academic counsellor.

#### 4.2.1 Concepts

Code-mixing, as discussed, refers to any admixture of linguistic elements of two or more language systems in the same utterance at various levels: phonological, lexical, grammatical and orthographical. In essence, code-mixing may be more adequately seen as occurring as a kind of intrasentential switching where code-switching more readily describes the phenomenon that occurs at the inter-sentential level of linguistic usage. Code-switching is thus a term in linguistics referring to the use of more than one language or variety in conversation. Bilinguals, who can speak at

least two languages, have the ability to use elements of both languages when conversing with another bilingual. Code-switching is the syntactically and phonologically appropriate use of multiple varieties.

Code-switching can occur between sentences (inter-sentential) or within a single sentence (intra-sentential). Although some commentators have seen code-switching as reflecting a lack of language ability, most contemporary scholars consider code-switching to be a normal and natural product of interaction between the bilingual (or multilingual) speaker's languages. Code-switching can be distinguished from other language contact phenomena such as loan translation (calques), borrowing, pidgins and creoles, and transfer or interference.

There are different perspectives on code-mixing and code-switching. A major approach in sociolinguistics focuses on the social motivations for switching, a line of inquiry concentrating both on immediate discourse factors such as lexical need and the topic and setting of the discussion, and on more distant factors such as speaker or group identity, and relationship-building (solidarity). Code-mixing may also be reflective of the frequency with which an individual uses particular expressions from one or the other language in his/her daily communications; thus, an expression from one language may more readily come to mind than the equivalent expression in the other language.

A second perspective primarily concerns syntactic constraints on switching and mixing code usage. This is a line of inquiry that has postulated grammatical rules and specific syntactic boundaries for where a switch may occur. While code-switching had previously been investigated as a matter of peripheral importance within the more narrow tradition of research on bilingualism, it has now moved into a more general focus of interest for sociolinguists, psycholinguists and general linguists. Code-switching can be related to and indicative of group membership in particular types of bilingual speech communities, such that the regularities of the alternating use of two or more languages within one conversation

may vary to a considerable degree between speech communities. Intrasentential code-switching, where it occurs, may be constrained by syntactic and morpho-syntactic factors which may or may not be universal in nature.

#### 4.2.2 Differences

Code-switching involves the movement, whether psychologically or sociologically motivated, from one discrete code (language or dialect) to another within a communicative event. Code-mixing, on the other hand, means the blending of two separate linguistic systems into one linguistic system. A very helpful analogy to clarify the differences between code-switching and code-mixing comes from chemistry. Code- switching is similar to the phenomena of suspension where the material is mixed into a suspended medium wherein the parts eventually separate and settle out of the mixture. Code-mixing is comparable to the phenomena of a solution where a type of bonding occurs that prevents the mixed elements from separating. Obviously, an intra-sentential mixture of codes in the course of discourse output is a little bit more complex than when a definite switch is made between two languages in the course of moving from one language to another in course of providing two different sentences.

The main motivations to switch or mix include to joke, means of expression, lack of language knowledge, change in members, and to maintain a sense of comfort. There are two distinct fields of approach applied to the study of bilingual language use: the grammatical perspective and the socio-functional perspective. The grammatical perspective analyses structural components within utterances, whereas the socio-functional perspective analyses the social implications demonstrated in a language interchange situation. Traditionally, the sociolinguists examine key social variables such as the identity of the speaker (gender, age, occupation, etc.), his or her relations with the other participants in a conversation (e.g., whether they are friends or distant acquaintances), or the formality of the context.

In the interpretation of the meaning of code-switching or code-mixing, the "we/they" codes portray social distance or authority. An individual makes a rational choice in determining the costs or benefits of the usage of a linguistic code or in some cases linguistic codes. Code-switching labelled as "unmarked" or "smooth switching" occurs frequently and is considered an accepted switch between languages. Code-mixing is not considered that way. Unmarked language switches conforms to the communities language and social norms. Marked switches are in direct opposition of preestablished language and social norms and as a result social distance is created between the community and the individual who made the marked language choice.

Speakers use their language choice to portray their perception of who they are, "their self". We also have the terminology of the matrix language and the embedded language. The matrix language refers to the language that is more dominant or more prevalent language in daily discourse. The embedded language consists of fragmentary elements form another language that is worked into the matrix language.

# LEARNING ACTIVITY 4.3

List the major differences between code-switching and code-mixing.

#### Note:

- a) Write your answer in the space given below.
- b) Check the answer with your academic counselor.

#### 4.2.3 Country practices

In countries with a large number of people from different ethnic backgrounds, communities will commonly switch between the language of their indigenous roots and the language of the country they are living in. Examples:

- Basque Country: In the Basque Country in Spain and France, codeswitching occurs frequently between Basque and Spanish.
- Canada: Code-switching may occur in communities in Canada with both Francophone and Anglophone populations. It is common enough that a slang term, Franglais, has developed.
- China: In China, code-switching occurs very frequently in regions where the spoken variety differs greatly from Standard Mandarin, the *lingua franca*. Many regions speak three varieties, along with Mandarin. As a former British colony, code-switching in Hong Kong switches between Cantonese and English.
- **Finland:** Especially younger speakers of Finland Swedish (a dialect of Swedish) frequently switch between Swedish and Finnish.
- **Germany:** In Germany, code-switching is particularly common among third-generation descendants of post-World War II immigrants from Turkey, Italy and other Southern European countries, as well as among the many so-called Russian Germans, who are Russian/former Soviet Union nationals with German ancestry that have been allowed to migrate to Germany since the early 1990s.
- **Gibraltar:** Code-switching can be seen among people who speak a unique mixture of English and Spanish called Llanito.
- India: In India, where English is a lingua franca, educated people

whose first language is a language other than English but who are also practically fluent in English and Hindi and Urdu often employ codeswitching by inserting English words, phrases or sentences into their conversations. This has given rise to dialects referred to jokingly as 'Hinglish', 'Tanglish', 'Banglish' 'Engdu", i.e., switching from Hindi, Tamil and Bangla to English and from English to Urdu, respectively.

- **Ireland:** The Irish may insert English into their Gaelic sentences. Conversely, Gaelic may be inserted into English conversation.
- Israel: As a result of the huge number of new immigrants living in Israel, code-switching is very common. New immigrants from the former Soviet Union, the biggest group of new immigrants in Israel, switch between Russian and Hebrew. Code-switching is also common with the native-born Israeli (Sabra) using words and expressions from Arabic and English in Hebrew. Code-switching between Hebrew and Arabic is also common among Palestinians in an Israeli Hebrew-speaking environment.
- Japan: Another example of this phenomenon is the mixing of
  Japanese and English by Western-educated Japanese and halfJapanese children, most notably those living in bilingual environments.
  And, code-switching is also widely seen among Americans of Japanese
  descent.
- **Kenya:** English being the official language and Kiswahili the national language, code-switching occurs frequently in almost all conversations, even professional ones. With 42 languages in the country there is also mixing of English and tribal languages. Code-switching between tribal languages is rare as most people will only be able to speak one tribal language. Asian (that is, Indian) communities also introduce code switching among Kiswahili, English and various South Asian languages (e.g., Gujarati, Hindi, etc.).

- **Lebanon:** The Arabic dialect spoken in Lebanon contains an amount of English and French words. It is also common to incorporate entire English and French phrases into everyday parlance. This is more among the educated Christian community.
- **Malaysia:** In Malaysia, the multi-racial community speaks "Manglish", a mixture of English with Malay.
- Malta: Code-switching occurs frequently in the bilingual nation of Malta. The mixture of Maltese and English is called Maltenglish.
- **New Zealand:** Code-switching is common among the Pacific Island community, between native Pasifika languages and English. However, the same is not true for the native Maori language.
- **Nigeria:** Code-switching occurs frequently in almost all conversations, even in professional settings. With the multiple languages in the country, there is often the mixing of English and tribal languages.
- **Philippines:** Code-switching occurs frequently in the Philippines. The most well-known form of code-switching is Taglish, which involves switching between Tagalog and English.
- **Romania:** Code-switching from Hungarian and Romanian happens to a certain extent among the bilingual members of the Hungarian minority in Romania.
- **Russia:** Code-switching from Tatar to Russian is very popular among bilingual urban Tatars. This situation is similar to that of other non-Russian urban populations in the former USSR.
- **Singapore:** The multi-racial community in this City State speaks "Singlish" (almost interchangeable with Manglish), a mixture of English with Hokkien, Mandarin Chinese and Malay.

- **South Africa:** Code switching is very common in South Africa due to the many languages of the country.
- Taiwan: Code-switching most commonly occurs between Standard Mandarin and Taiwanese, but have been observed to occur with Hokkien, other local languages (e.g. Formosoan) and sometimes Japanese as well. The degrees of usage can vary from complete sentences (e.g., a Mandarin conversation occasionally being replied with Taiwanese), or simply one or 2 words used in a similar manner to a loanword.
- Ukraine: In contemporary Ukraine both Ukranian-Russian codeswitching and language mixing are sometimes used. At the start of conversation if speakers find that they are speaking different languages, one of them may switch to another language. Switching several times in one conversation is not frequently met. Mixing Ukrainian and Russian words is generally considered vulgar.
- United Kingdom: Code-switching occurs in the South-Asian heritage communities in the UK. Code-switching also occurs in Wales. Codeswitching is also common in users of the Scottish Gaelic and lowland Scots languages.
- USA: Code-switching occurs in the immigrant communities in the United States.

## 4.3 SITUATIONAL AND METAPHORICAL CODE-SWITCHING

If we equate code with language, for the purpose of discussion, we can describe the two kinds of code-switching, situational code-switching and metaphorical code-switching, which we will elaborate in Sub-sections 4.3.1 and 4.3.2, respectively.

#### 4.3.1 Situational code-switching

This occurs when the languages used change according to the situations in which the speakers find themselves: they speak one language in one situation and another in a different one. No topic change is involved.

Instances of situational code-switching are usually fairly easy to classify for what they are. What we observe is that one variety is used in a certain set of situations and another in an entirely different set. However, the changeover from one to the other may be instantaneous. Sometimes the situations are so socially prescribed that they can even be taught, e.g., those associated with ceremonial or religious functions. Others may be more subtly determined but speakers readily observe the norms.

You may like to note in this context that this kind of code-switching differs from diglossia. In diglossic communities, the situation also controls the choice of variety but the choice is much more rigidly defined by the particular activity that is involved and by the relationship between the participants. Diglossia reinforces differences, whereas code-switching tends to reduce them.

Code-switching, on the other hand, is often quite subconscious: people may not be aware that they have switched or be able to report, following a conversation, which code they used for a particular topic.

#### 4.3.2 Metaphorical code-switching

When a change of topic requires a change in the language used, we have metaphorical code-switching. It has an affective dimension to it: you change the code as you redefine the situation – formal to informal, official to personal, serious to humorous, and politeness to solidarity. Gumperz

(1982a) cites examples of metaphorical code-switching from three sets of languages (i.e., Hindi and English, Slovenian and German, and Spanish and English) to show how speakers employ particular languages to convey information that goes beyond their actual words, especially to define social situations.

What happens in each case is that one language expresses a 'we-type' solidarity among participants, and is therefore deemed suitable for *ingroup* and informal activities, whereas the other language is 'they-oriented' and is considered appropriate to *out-group* and more formal relationships, particularly of an impersonal kind. The 'we-they' distinction is by no means absolute, so fine-shading is possible in switching, i.e., certain topics may be discussed in either code, and the particular choice made itself helps to define the social situation or to shift that definition, as the case may be. Metaphorical code-switching, thus, suggests that it is deeply ingrained and serves subtle but strong functions.

Clearly, code-switching is not a uniform phenomenon. The norms vary from group to group and even within, what might be regarded as, a single community. Since bilingual usage rules must be learned by living in a group, ability to speak appropriately is a strong indication of shared background assumptions. Bilinguals, in fact, ordinarily do not use codeswitching styles in their contact with other bilinguals before they know something about the listener's background and attitudes. To do otherwise would be to risk serious misunderstanding.

Consider the kind of code-switching that occurs among certain young people of Caribbean descent in England. These youngsters speak the local variety of English natively but also have a creole-based variety of their own, which they switch to for purposes of solidarity. What is interesting is that on certain occasions, they will allow youths of their acquaintance from other ethnic groups to switch to that variety too, as they show their willingness to extend some kind of solidarity to them.

# LEARNING ACTIVITY 4.4

State how situational code-switching is different from the metaphorical one.

#### Note:

- a) Write your answer in the space given below.
- b) Check the answer with your academic counsellor.

#### 4.3.3 Resistance to code-switching

We must also note that code-switching may also meet with certain kinds of resistance.

Numerous instances have been reported of speakers of various languages refusing to allow others to code-switch and instead insisting on using the other's language, even if sometimes such use provided a poorer means of communication. In colonial times, Europeans have been known to use a local language very badly with servants rather than let them use English, French, and so on, in order to maintain social distance.

In other circumstances, knowledge of the second code must be suppressed, i.e., code-switching is disallowed. Certain social situations may require that one code be used rather than another, even though that second code is known to all participants but the first only to some. For example, a head of State may be required to use the official language of that State when addressing another head of State, at least in public. On many public occasions in Canada, it is obligatory for officials to say a few words in the official language that they are not using, e.g., introduce some French sentences into an otherwise all-English speech.

The ability to code-switch may even be regarded with suspicion or disfavour in certain circumstances. For instance, speakers of English do not usually give much credit to their fellows who speak 'exotic' languages, such ability being regarded quite often as 'strange' in some way. Certain English speaking societies, for example, find difficulty in coming to terms with immigrants who speak other languages, the resulting multilingualism often being viewed as creating a 'problem.'

There can also be a switch of codes within a simple utterance without any associated topic change. Pfaff (1979) provides the following examples of this kind of code-switching (sometimes called intra-sentential code-switching, or code-mixing) among Spanish–English bilinguals:

No van a bring it up in the meeting.

'They are not going to bring it up in the meeting.'

Todos los Mexicanos were riled up.

'All the Mexicans were riled up.'

Bilinguals often switch like this, primarily as a solidarity marker and this kind of mixture has become an established community.

As mentioned earlier, a fundamental difficulty in understanding the phenomenon of code-switching is accounting for a particular choice or switch on a particular occasion. In order to provide such an account, we must look at the total linguistic situation in which the choice is made, e.g., the linguistic situation in New York City, Brussels, Luxembourg, Kampala, Hemnesberget, or Papua New Guinea.

We have seen numerous examples of the power and solidarity dimensions.

As we have seen, your choice of code also reflects how you want to appear to others, i.e., how you want to express your identity and/or how you want others to view you. This is apparent from various *matched-guise* experiments that certain social psychologists have conducted. If person A is perfectly bilingual in languages X and Y, how is he or she judged as a person when speaking X?

How do the same judges evaluate Speaker A, when A is speaking language Y? In matched-guise experiments, the judges would be unaware that they are judging Speaker A twice and that the only variable is that A is using language X on one occasion and language Y on the other, and using each for the same purpose. Their judgments, therefore, really reflect their feelings about speakers of X and Y, feelings about such matters as their competence, integrity, and attractiveness.

Lambert, a Canadian social psychologist, developed this technique in order to explore how listeners react to various characteristics in speech. Listeners were asked to judge particular speech samples recorded by bilingual or bidialectal speakers, using one language or dialect (one guise) on one occasion and the other language or dialect (the other guise) in identical circumstances. The judgments sought are of such qualities as intelligence, kindness, dependability, ambition, leadership, sincerity, and sense of humor. Since the only factor that is varied is the language or dialect used, the responses provide group evaluations of speakers of these languages and dialects and therefore tap *social stereotypes*.

In one such study Lambert (1967) reported the reactions of Canadian men and women, both English and French speakers, to subjects who spoke English on one occasion and French on another. Both English and French listeners reacted more positively to English guises than French guises. Among 80 English Canadian and 92 French Canadian first-year collegeage students from Montreal, he found that the English Canadian listeners viewed the female speakers more favourably in their French guises while they viewed the male speakers more favourably in their English guises. In particular, the English Canadian men saw the French Canadian lady speakers as more intelligent, ambitious, self-confident, dependable, courageous and sincere than their English counterparts.

Code-switching can be a very useful social skill. The converse of this, of course, is that we will be judged by the code, we choose to employ on a particular occasion. People have distinct feelings about various codes: they find some accents 'unpleasant,' others 'beautiful'; some registers 'stuffy'; some styles 'pedantic'; some languages or kinds of language 'unacceptable' or their speakers 'less desirable'; and so on. We cannot discount such reactions by simply labeling them as instances of *linguistic prejudice*. Linguistic prejudice, either for or against particular accents, dialects, or languages, is a fact of life, a fact we must recognize.

However, we must also remember that it is often all too easy to think that someone who uses learned words, beautifully constructed sentences, and a prestige accent must be saying something worthwhile and that someone who uses common words, much 'slurring,' and a regional accent cannot have anything of interest to say!

#### 4.4 MULTILINGUALISM AND BILINGUALISM

Monolingualism, i.e., the ability to use only one language, is such a widely accepted norm in so many parts of the Western world that it is often assumed to be a world-wide phenomenon, to the extent that bilingual and multilingual individuals may appear to be 'unusual.' Indeed, we often have

mixed feelings when we discover that someone we meet is fluent in several languages: perhaps a mixture of admiration and envy but also, occasionally, a feeling of superiority in that many such people are not 'native' to the culture in which we function.

#### 4.4.1 Multilingualism

Such people are likely to be immigrants, visitors, or children of 'mixed' marriages and in that respect 'marked' in some way, and such marking is not always regarded favourably. However, in many parts of the world an ability to speak more than one language is not at all remarkable. In fact, a monolingual individual would be regarded as a misfit, lacking an important skill in society, the skill of being able to interact freely with the speakers of other languages with whom regular contact is made in the ordinary business of living. In many parts of the world it is just a normal requirement of daily living that people speak several languages: perhaps one or more at home, another in the village, still another for purposes of trade, and yet another for contact with the outside world of wider social or political organization.

These various languages are usually acquired naturally and unselfconsciously, and the shifts from one to another are made without hesitation. People who are bilingual or multilingual do not necessarily have exactly the same abilities in the languages (or varieties); in fact, that kind of parity may be exceptional. As Sridhar (1996) says, multilingualism involving balanced, nativelike command of all the languages in the repertoire is rather uncommon.

Typically, multilinguals have varying degrees of command of the different repertoires. The differences in competence in the various languages might range from command of a few lexical items, formulaic expressions such as greetings, and rudimentary conversational skills all the way to excellent command of the grammar and vocabulary and specialized register and styles. Sridhar adds: 'Multilinguals develop competence in each of the codes to the extent that they need it and for the contexts in which each of the languages is used.' Context determines language choice. In a society in which more than one language (or variety) is used you must find out who uses what, when, and for what purpose if you are to be socially competent. Your language choices are part of the social identity you claim for yourself.

#### 4.4.2 Bilingualism

Attempts to distinguish people who are bilingual from those who are bidialectal may fail. There may be some doubt that very many people are actually bi- or even multi-dialectal. They may speak varieties which are distinctly different, but whether each separate variety is genuinely a dialect depends on how one defines dialect. Is someone who speaks both Hindi and Urdu bilingual, who speaks both Serbian and Croatian, Nynorsk and Bokmål, or Russian and Ukrainian? Such speakers may well tell you they are. But, on the other hand, a Chinese who speaks both Mandarin and Cantonese will almost certainly insist that he or she speaks only two dialects of Chinese, just as an Arab who knows both a colloquial variety and the classical, literary variety of Arabic will insist that they are only different varieties of the same language. In some cases, then, the bilingualbidialectal distinction that speakers make reflects social, cultural, and political aspirations or realities rather than any linguistic reality. What we will concern ourselves with, then, are unequivocal cases in which there can be no doubt that the two languages, or codes, are mutually unintelligible.

A different kind of bilingual situation exists in Paraguay (Rubin, 1968). Because of its long isolation from Spain and the paucity of its Spanish-speaking population, an American Indian language, Guaraní, has flourished in Paraguay to the extent that today it is the mother tongue of about 90% of the population and a second language of several additional percent. Guaraní is recognized as a national language. On the other hand, Spanish, which is the sole language of less than 7% of the population, is the official language of government and the medium of education, although in

recent years some use has been made of Guaraní in primary education. In the 1951 census just over half the population were bilingual in Guaraní and Spanish. These figures indicate that the lesserknown language in Paraguay is Spanish. The capital city, Asunción, is almost entirely bilingual, but the further one goes into the countryside away from cities and towns the more monolingually Guaraní-speaking the population becomes.

Spanish and Guaraní exist in a relationship that Fishman (1980) calls 'extended diglossic' in which Spanish is the H variety and Guaraní the L variety. Spanish is the language used on formal occasions; it is always used in government business, in conversation with strangers who are well dressed, with foreigners, and in most business transactions. People use Guaraní, however, with friends, servants, and strangers who are poorly dressed, in the confessional, when they tell jokes or make love, and on most casual occasions. Spanish is the preferred language of the cities, but Guaraní is preferred in the countryside, and the lower classes almost always use it for just about every purpose in rural areas. The choice between Spanish and Guaraní depends on a variety of factors: location (city or country), formality, gender, status, intimacy, seriousness, and type of activity. The choice of one code rather than the other is obviously related to situation.

Bilingualism is actually sometimes regarded as a problem in that many bilingual individuals tend to occupy rather low positions in society and knowledge of another language becomes associated with 'inferiority.' Bilingualism is sometimes seen as a personal and social problem, not something that has strong positive connotations. One unfortunate consequence is that some Western societies go to great lengths to downgrade, even eradicate, the languages that immigrants bring with them while at the same time trying to teach foreign languages in schools. What is more, they have had much more success in doing the former than the latter.

#### Sociolinguistics

A bilingual, or multilingual, situation can produce still other effects on one or more of the languages involved. As we have just seen, it can lead to loss, e.g., language loss among immigrants. But sometimes it leads to diffusion; that is, certain features spread from one language to the other (or others) as a result of the contact situation, particularly certain kinds of syntactic features. This phenomenon has been observed in such areas as the Balkans, the south of India, and Sri Lanka.

Gumperz and Wilson (1971) report that in Kupwar, a small village of about 3,000 inhabitants in Maharashtra, India, four languages are spoken: Marathi and Urdu (both of which are Indo-European) and Kannada (a non-Indo-European language). A few people also speak Telugu (also a non-Indo-European language). The languages are distributed mainly by caste. The highest caste, the Jains, speak Kannada and the lowest caste speak Marathi. People in different castes must speak to one another and to the Telugu-speaking rope-makers.

The Urdu-speaking Muslims must also be fitted in. Bilingualism or even trilingualism is normal, particularly among the men, but it is Marathi which dominates inter-group communication. One linguistic consequence, however, is that there has been some convergence of the languages that are spoken in the village so far as syntax is concerned, but vocabulary differences have been maintained (McMahon, 1994). It is vocabulary rather than syntax which now serves to distinguish the groups, and the variety of multilingualism that has resulted is a special local variety which has developed in response to local needs.

# LEARNING ACTIVITY 4.5

What is meant by bilingualism?

#### Note:

- a) Write your answer in the space given below.
- b) Check the answer with your academic counsellor.

#### **SUMMARY**

We began the Unit by explaining the concepts of diglossic and codes with a view to providing a strong foundation for the discussion of code-switching and code-mixing that followed. We the discussed at length the concepts of code-switching and code-mixing and their differences. We also gave you a list of countries where where code-switching/mixing is prevalent primarily due to their multi-ethnic or multi-linguistic and/or immigrant nature. Later, we not only explained the two important ways by which code-switching happens, i.e., situational and metaphorical, but also touched upon the instances of resistance to code-switching. We completed the Unit by discussing multilingualism and bilingualism in the context of code-switching.

# UNIT 5

# **Speech Communities and Speech Acts**

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#### Overview

Learning objectives

- 5.1 Speech Communities
  - 5.1.1 Linguistic communities
  - 5.1.2 Intersecting communities
  - 5.1.3 Networks and repertoires
- 5.2 Speech Acts
  - 5.2.1 Illocutionary acts
  - 5.2.2 Cooperation
  - 5.2.3 Conversation
- **5.3** Speech Events

#### **Summary**

#### **OVERVIEW**

In this Unit, we will introduce you to the concept of speech community and speech acts. In this context, we will describe speech community, an important concept in sociolinguistics, as a more or less discrete group of people who use language in a unique and mutually accepted way among themselves. We will discuss the topic of speech community elaborately by referring to such concepts as linguistic communities, intersecting communities and community networks and repertoires. Subsequently, we will discuss speech acts by explaining the concepts of illocutionary

functions, cooperation and conversation. We will close the Unit by touching upon speech events.

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing the Unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the importance of speech communities in the context of sociolinguistics.
- Discuss the concepts of speech acts and speech events.

#### 5.1 SPEECH COMMUNITIES: CONCEPT

Language is both an individual possession and a social possession. We would expect, therefore, that certain individuals would behave linguistically like other individuals: they might be said to speak the same language or the same dialect or the same variety, i.e., to employ the same code, and in that respect to be members of the same *speech community*. Before we proceed any further, you may like to note here that while there are registers or jargons (i.e., use of language by certain professions for particular activities); discourse communities (i.e., group of speakers of a register); dialects, the notion of 'speech community' is reserved for varieties of a language or dialect that speakers inherit by birth or adoption.

The emergence of the concept 'speech community' as a focus area in sociolinguistics can be attributed to William Labov's pioneering studies in language variation. His studies established that besides class and profession, socio-economic aspirations and mobility of a 'community' of people contribute to language variation. This is much beyond the studies of linguistic variation between different dialects. The primary application of dialectology is in rural communities with little physical mobility. There was no framework for describing language variation in cities. Studies on speech community filled the gap.

The notion of speech community is generally used as a tool to define a unit of analysis within which to analyze language variation and change. It has been found that stylistic features differ among speech communities based on factors such as the group's socio-economic status, common interests and the level of formality expected within the group and by its larger society.

According to Gumperz (1968), a 'speech community' is "any human aggregate characterised by regular and frequent interaction by means of a shared body of verbal signs and set off from similar aggregates by significant differences in language usage". Indeed, much work in sociolinguistics is based on the assumption that it is possible to use the concept of 'speech community' without much difficulty. Hudson (1996) rejects that view:

[O]ur sociolinguistic world is not organized in terms of objective "speech communities," even though we like to think subjectively in terms of communities or social types such as "Londoner" and "American." This means that the search for a "true" definition of the speech community, or for the "true" boundaries around some speech community, is just a wild goose chase.'

We will indeed discover that just as it is difficult to define such terms as language, dialect, and variety, it is also difficult to define speech community, and for many of the same reasons. That difficulty, however, will not prevent us from using the term. In other words, the concept has proved to be invaluable in sociolinguistic work in spite of the difficulty in establishing its precise characteristics. For purely theoretical purposes, some linguists have hypothesized the existence of an 'ideal' speech community. This is actually what Chomsky (1965) proposes when he refers to a "completely homogeneous speech community."

For our discussion, we are not referring to such an ideal speech community. Our speech communities, whatever they are, exist in a 'real' world. Consequently, we must try to find some alternative view of speech community, one helpful to investigations of language in society rather than necessitated by abstract linguistic theorizing.

In this context, it is important for us to note that speech communities cannot be defined solely by their linguistic characteristics. We must also acknowledge that using linguistic characteristics alone to determine what is or is not a speech community has proved so far to be quite impossible because people do not necessarily feel any such direct relationship between linguistic characteristics A, B, C, and so on, and speech community X. What we can be sure of is that speakers do use linguistic characteristics to achieve group identity with, and group differentiation from, other speakers, but they use other characteristics as well: social, cultural, political and ethnic, to name a few.

We should, therefore, look for criteria in addition to the linguistic ones, if we are to gain a useful understanding of 'speech community.' Giles, Scherer, and Taylor (1979) are of the view that there are, what they call, speech markers such as social categories of age, sex, ethnicity, social class and situation that can be clearly marked on the basis of speech. Such categorization, they observe, is fundamental to social organization even though many of the categories are also easily discriminated on other bases.

#### 5.1.1 Linguistic community

As implied earlier, the concept of *speech community* is an abstract one because the particular norms that a community uses may or may not be exclusively linguistic in nature, and even if we assume so, the linguistic norms themselves may vary considerably among small sub-groups. For example, speakers of Hindi may separate themselves entirely from speakers of Urdu and most Chinese may see themselves as members of the same community as all other Chinese, even though speakers of Cantonese

or Hokkien might not be able to express that sense of community to a speaker of Mandarin or to each other except through their shared writing system.

The single-language, or single-variety, criterion is also a very dubious one. Gumperz (1971) points out that 'there are no *a priori* grounds which force us to define speech communities so that all members speak the same language.' In other words, many societies have existed and still exist in which bilingualism and multilingualism are normal. For example, early in the year 2000, London was judged to be the most 'international' of all cities in the world based on the number of different languages spoken there – over 300. It is such considerations as these which lead Gumperz to use the term *linguistic community* rather than speech community.

He proceeds to define that term as follows: a social group, which may be either monolingual or multilingual, held together by frequency of social interaction patterns and set off from the surrounding areas by weaknesses in the lines of communication. Linguistic communities may consist of small groups bound together by face-to-face contact or may cover large regions, depending on the level of abstraction we wish to achieve.

Such a definition is an extension of the one that Bloomfield (1933) uses to open his discussion on speech communities: 'a speech community is a group of people who interact by means of speech.' The extension is provided by the insistence that a group or community is defined not only by what it is but by what it is *not*.

#### 5.1.2 Intersecting communities

The fact that people do use expressions such as *New York speech*, *London speech* and *Madrasi speech* (referring to South Indian region) indicates that they have some idea of how a 'typical' person from each of these places speaks. That is to say, what it is like to be a member of a particular speech

community can be loosely defined. Such a person may be said to be typical by virtue of observing the linguistic norms one associates with the particular place in question. But just what are these norms?

A person's perceptions of the language characteristics of particular areas do not always accord with linguistic facts. Rosen (1980) has indicated some of the problems we find in trying to call a city like London a speech community and in describing exactly what characterizes its speech. Each individual is a member of many different groups. It is in the best interests of most people to be able to identify themselves on one occasion as members of one group and on another as members of another group. Such groups may or may not overlap.

One of the consequences of the intersecting identifications is linguistic variation, i.e., people do not speak alike, nor does any individual always speak in the same way on every occasion. The variation we see in language must partly reflect a need that people have to be seen as the same as certain other people on some occasions and as different from them on other occasions.

#### 5.1.3 Networks and repertoires

Understanding language in society means that one also has to understand the social networks in which language is embedded. A social network is one of the means of describing a particular speech community in terms of relations between individual members in a community. A network could be loose or tight depending on how members interact with each other. For instance, an office or factory may be considered a tight community because all members interact with each other. A multiplex community is one in which members have multiple relationships with each other. For instance, in some neighbourhoods, members may live on the same street, work for the same employer, etc.

The looseness or tightness of a social network may affect speech patterns adopted by a speaker. A social network may apply to the macro level of a country or a city, but also to the inter-personal level of neighbourhoods or

a single family. Recently, social networks have been formed by the Internet, through chat rooms, MySpace groups, organisations, online dating services, etc. Let us discuss the concepts of networks and repertoires further.

#### Networks

As mentioned, one way of viewing how an individual relates to other individuals in society is to ask what *networks* he or she participates in. That is, how and on what occasions does a specific individual 'X' interact now with 'Y', then with 'Z', and then again with 'A'? How intensive are the various relationships? For example, does 'X' interact more frequently with 'Y' than with 'Z' or 'A'? How extensive is X's relationship with Y in the sense of how many other individuals interact with both X and Y in whatever activity brings them together? If, in a situation in which X, Y, Z, A, and B are linked in a network, are they all equally linked; strongly linked but with the link through X predominant; weakly linked, with the link to X providing all the connections; or, is the link from X to B achieved through Z? The possibilities are numerous.

Note that one is said to be involved in a *dense* network, if the people they know and interact with also know and interact with one another. If they do not, the network is a *loose* one. Middle-class networks are likely to be loose and simplex; therefore, social cohesion is reduced and there are weaker feelings of solidarity and identity.

You are also said to be involved in a *multiplex* network, if the people within it are tied together in more than one way, i.e., not just through work but also through other social activities. People who go to school together, marry each other's siblings, and work and play together participate in dense multiplex networks. Such networks indicate strong social cohesion, produce feelings of solidarity, and encourage individuals to identify with others within the network.

Being a member of an open or closed network is quite different, if you live in Cuttack, Gangtok, Luckow, Ettayapuram, Idukki, and so on. We do not wish to imply that the notion of network loses its methodological importance in non-urban settings, but only that the linguistic effect of closed and open networks is intimately related to the type of community under study.

#### Repertoire

An individual also has a *speech repertoire*; that is, he or she controls a number of varieties of a language or of two or more languages. Quite often, many individuals will have virtually identical repertoires. The concept of speech repertoire may be most useful when applied to individuals rather than to groups. We can use it to describe the *communicative competence* of individual speakers. Each person will then have a distinctive speech repertoire.

In this view, each individual has his or her own distinctive verbal repertoire and each speech community in which that person participates has its distinctive speech repertoire. In fact, one could argue that this repertoire is its defining feature. Focusing on the repertoires of individuals and specifically on the precise linguistic choices they make in well-defined circumstances does seem to offer us some hope of explaining how people use linguistic choices to bond themselves to others in very subtle ways. A speaker's choice of a particular sound, word, or expression marks that speaker in some way. It can say 'I am like you' or 'I am not like you.'

When the speaker also has some kind of range within which to choose and that choice itself helps to define the occasion, then many different outcomes are possible. A particular choice may say 'I am an X just like you' or it may say 'I am an X but you are a Y.' It may even be possible that a particular choice may say 'Untill now I have been an X but from now on you must regard me as a Y,' as when, for example, someone pretends to be something he or she is not and then slips up.

However, it also seems that it is not merely a simple matter of always choosing X rather than Y, e.g., of never saying *singin*' but always saying *singing*. Rather, it may be a matter of proportion. You will say *singin*' a certain percent of the time and *singing* the rest of the time. In other words, the social bonding that results from the linguistic choices you make may depend on the quantity of certain linguistic characteristics as well as their quality.

We have seen that speech community may be an impossibly difficult concept to define. But, in attempting to do so, we have also become aware that it may be just as difficult to characterize the speech of a single individual. Perhaps, that second failure follows inevitably from the first. We should be very cautious, therefore, about definitive statements we may be tempted to make about how a particular individual speaks, the classic concept of *idiolect*.

At this juncture, you may wish to keep in mind that it is very difficult to precisely know as to how even a single individual speaks in a limited set of circumstances. From certain theoretical aspects, we might be able to ignore such instances, as Chomsky himself suggests. But, then, it would be unwise for sociolinguists to do so because this is what sociolinguistics is all about: trying to work out either the social significance of various uses of language or the linguistic significance of various social factors.

# LEARNING ACTIVITY 5.1

Explain the factors that establish the concept of speech communities.

#### Note:

- a) Write your answer in the space given below.
- b) Check the answer with your academic counsellor.

### **5.2 SPEECH ACTS**

We communicate with one another by making utterances, some of which people classify as difficult, confusing, easy to understand, etc. Generally, we try to classify the utterances by length, e.g., by counting the number of words in each utterance. But, this may prove to be a naïve act because it seems to suggest that shorter utterances are relatively easier to understand. But, is that true? There could be a whole lot different ways to classify utterances.

For example, we can try to classify them by grammatical structure along a number of dimensions, i.e., their clausal type and complexity: active—

passive; statement—question—request—exclamatory; various combinations of these and so on. We may even try to work out a semantic or logical structure for each utterance. But, it is also possible to attempt a classification in terms of what sentences do, i.e., to take a 'functional' approach, but one that goes somewhat beyond consideration of such functions as stating, questioning, requesting and exclaiming. In recent years, a number of philosophers have had interesting things to say about what utterances do as well as mean, observing that part of the total meaning is this very doing.

Before you proceed further, note that classifying the utterances on linguistic terms is just one aspect. In fact, any utterance gets its meaning or the level of difficult only from the nature of relationship between the one who makes the utterances and the other who receives them.

When we have a close look at conversations, we could see that they involve much more than mere use of language to state propositions or convey facts. In addition, seldom would we use language monologically, and such cases are clearly marked. The unmarked use is dialogical, i.e., with others in various kinds of verbal give-and-take, which we call conversation. Through conversation, we establish relationships with others, achieve a measure of cooperation (or fail to do so), keep channels open for further relationships, and so on. In short, utterances are used for various purposes:

• Making propositions: Utterances do this mainly in the form of either statements or questions but other grammatical forms are also possible, e.g., 'I had a busy day today,' 'Have you called your mother?', 'Your dinner's ready!', etc. Such utterances are connected in some way with events or happenings in a possible world, i.e., one that can be experienced or imagined, a world in which such propositions can be said to be either true or false. They have been called *constative utterances*.

A different kind of proposition is the *ethical proposition*, e.g., 'Big boys don't cry,' 'God is love,' 'Thou shalt not kill,' 'Truth prevails', etc. The purpose of ethical propositions is to serve as guides to certain behaviour. For example, 'Big boys don't cry' is obviously value-laden in a way in which 'Your dinner's ready!' definitely is not.

• **Phatic utterances**: Examples of *phatic utterance* include 'Nice day!,' 'How do you do?,' and 'You're looking smart today!' We employ such utterances not for their propositional content but rather for their affective value as indicators that one person is willing to talk to another and that a channel of communication is either being opened or being kept open. Phatic utterances do not really communicate anything; rather, their use allows communication to occur, should there be anything of consequence to say.

The specific kind of utterances or expressions like 'Nice day!,' 'How do you do?,' 'You're looking smart today', etc., are also referred to as *phatic communion*. According to Malinowski (1923), phatic communion is a type of speech in which ties of union are created by a mere exchange of words. In such communion, words do not convey meanings. Instead, 'they fulfill a social function, and that is their principal aim.'

• **Performative utterances**: In using a *performative utterance* (Austin, 1975), a person is not just saying something but is actually doing something, if certain real-world conditions are met. To say 'I name this ship, Caribbean Queen' in certain circumstances is to name a ship. To hear someone say to you 'I sentence you to five years in jail' in still other circumstances is to look forward to a rather bleak future. Such utterances perform acts, i.e., the naming of ships and sentencing in the above cases. Austin points that the 'circumstances' mentioned above can be prescribed. He mentions

certain *felicity conditions* that performatives must meet to be successful. First, a conventional procedure must exist for doing whatever is to be done, and that procedure must specify who must say and do what and in what circumstances. Second, all participants must properly execute this procedure and carry it through to completion. Finally, the necessary thoughts, feelings, and intentions must be present in all parties.

Each utterance is an act, serving the direct aim of binding the hearer to the speaker by a tie of some social sentiment or other. Once more, language appears to us in this function not as an instrument of reflection but as a mode of action.

#### 5.2.1 Illocutionary acts

According to Searle (1969), we perform different kinds of acts, when we speak. The utterances we use are *locutions*. Most locutions express some intent that a speaker has. They are *illocutionary acts* and have an *illocutionary force*. A speaker can also use different locutions to achieve the same illocutionary force or use one locution for many different purposes. Schiffrin (1994) has a very good example of the latter. She shows how one form, 'Y'want a piece of candy?' can perform many functions as a speech act, including question, request and offer. In contrast, we can see how different forms can perform a single function since it is quite possible to ask someone to close the door with different words: 'It's cold in here,' 'The door's open,' and 'Could someone see to the door?'

Illocutions also often cause listeners to do things. To that extent they are *perlocutions*. If you say 'I bet you a dollar he'll win' and I say a mere 'On,' your illocutionary act of offering a bet has led to my perlocutionary uptake of accepting it. The *perlocutionary force* of your words is to get me to bet, and you have succeeded.

Searle (1999) says that illocutionary acts must be performed 'intentionally.' In order to communicate something in a language that will be understood by another speaker of that language as an utterance it must (1) be correctly uttered with its conventional meaning and (2) satisfy a truth condition, i.e., if it is 'It is raining' it must indeed be raining, and the hearer should recognize the truth of (1) and (2): 'if the hearer knows the language, recognizes my intention to produce a sentence of the language, and recognizes that I am not merely uttering that sentence but that I also mean what I say, then I will have succeeded in communicating to the hearer that it is raining.'

Searle has concentrated his work on speech acts on how a hearer perceives a particular utterance to have the force it has, what he calls the 'uptake' of an utterance. In particular, what makes a promise a promise? For Searle, there are five rules that govern promise-making and these are listed below:

- 1. The *propositional content rule* requires that the words must predicate a future action of the speaker.
- 2. The *preparatory rules* require that the person promising must want the act done and also must believe he or she can do what is promised.
- 3. The *preparatory rules* require that the person to whom the promise is made must want the act done and that it would not otherwise be done.
- 4. The *sincerity rule* requires the promiser to intend to perform the act, that is, to be placed under some kind of obligation.
- 5. The *essential rule* says that the uttering of the words counts as undertaking an obligation to perform the action.

What it seems to imply that it should be possible to state the necessary and sufficient conditions for every illocutionary act. But, you should reflect on the veracity of this statement as you go through this Course.

#### 5.2.2 Cooperation

We can view utterances as acts of various kinds and the exchanges of utterances, which we call conversations, as exchanges of acts and not just exchanges of words, although they are this too. However, we must ask how we can make such exchanges without achieving some prior agreement, concerning the very principles of exchange.

According to philosophers such as Grice, we are able to converse with one another because we recognize common goals in conversation and specific ways of achieving these goals. In any conversation, there are constraints that limit the exchange possibilities. These constraints limit the speakers as to what they can say and listeners as to what they can infer.

Grice (1975) maintains that the overriding principle in conversation is one he calls the *cooperative principle* and in this regard advocates the following four maxims:

- 1. **Quantity:** The maxim of *quantity* requires you to make your contribution as informative as is required. If you are assisting me to mend an engine, I expect your contribution to be neither more nor less than is required. For example, if I need four screws, I expect you to hand me four, rather than two or six. You must, therefore, act in conversation in accord with a general principle that you are mutually engaged with your listener or listeners in an activity that is of benefit to all, that benefit being mutual understanding.
- 2. Quality: The maxim of quality requires you not to say what you believe to be false or that for which you lack adequate evidence. I expect your contributions to be genuine and not spurious. If I need sugar as an ingredient in the meal you are assisting me to make, I

expect you to hand me sugar and not salt. If I need a spoon, I do not expect a trick spoon made of rubber.

- 3. Relation: The simple injunction this maxim requires is to be relevant. I expect a partner's contribution to be appropriate to immediate needs at each stage of the transaction. If I am mixing ingredients for a cake, I do not expect to be handed a cook book, or even an oven cloth (though this might be an appropriate contribution at a later stage).
- 4. **Manner:** This maxim requires you to avoid obscurity of expression and ambiguity, and to be brief and orderly. I expect a partner to make it clear what contribution he/she is making, and to execute their performance with reasonable level of acceptance.

These four maxims of the cooperative principle characterize ideal exchanges. Such exchanges would also observe certain other principles too, such as 'Be polite.' Grice points out that these maxims do not apply to conversations alone. These are involved in all kinds of rational cooperative behaviour. However, it should be pointed out that everyday speech often occurs in less than ideal circumstances and speakers do not always follow the maxims. What happens as a result is that they may *implicate* something rather different from what they actually say.

Grice offers the following examples to make his point:

- A: I am out of petrol.
- B: There is a garage round the corner.
- A: Smith doesn't seem to have a girlfriend these days.
- B: He has been paying a lot of visits to New York lately.

In the first set, Grice says that no maxim is violated, for B's response in each case is an adequate response to A's remark:

#### 5.2.3 Conversation

Speech can be planned or unplanned (Ochs, 1979). We should note that a lot of speech has a certain amount of planning in it. It may not be all thought out and carefully planned and even rehearsed, as, for example, is the welcoming speech of a visiting head of State, but parts may be preplanned to a greater or lesser extent. Unplanned speech is talk which is not thought out prior to its expression.

Unplanned speech has certain characteristics: repetitions; simple active sentences; speaker and listener combining to construct propositions; stringing of clauses together with *and* or *but* or the juxtapositioning of clauses with no overt links at all; deletion of subjects and referents; and use of deictics, e.g., words such as *this*, *that*, *here* and *there*. It may also be filled with equivocations (or *hedges*), i.e., words and expressions such as *well*, *like*, *maybe*, *but*, *sort of*, *you know*, *I guess*, etc.

The syntax of unplanned conversation is also not at all that of formal, edited written prose. It is composed of utterances that are often fragmented and overlapping. They are not the complete, non-overlapping sentences which we carefully organize into larger units like the paragraphs, sections, and chapters of a book such as this one. It is the rare person indeed who 'speaks in paragraphs.' Unplanned speech, however, is not unorganized speech. Unorganized speech would be speech in which anything goes.

There are specific procedures we must follow as we indulge in the giveand-take of conversation. We ignore or violate these at our peril. A very simple illustration should suffice. You find yourself lost in a large city and need to seek help. Who do you approach, what do you say, and what limits are there to any subsequent verbal exchanges? Analysts working in the ethnomethodological tradition have paid close attention to conversation. They have examined how people manage conversations, how talk proceeds in turns, how one utterance relates to another often in some kind of pair relationship, how topics are introduced, developed and changed and so on. Their concern is the very orderliness of talk; they regard conversation as skilled work in which we necessarily participate.

When we look at how actual speech or conversation is organized, we begin to appreciate how complex it is as soon as we try to devise any kind of system for talking about the various bits and pieces that occur and recur. If a conversation is 'interesting,' it is largely so because of the unpredictability of its content, so classifying by content is likely to be an impossible task. However, finding the organizational principles used offers us some hope. Even the most unpredictable of conversations is likely to make use of such principles; in fact, we might argue that something is a conversation not so much by reason of *what* was said but by reason of *how* it was said, i.e., by the use of certain principles that we employ time and time again to structure what we want to say.

What speakers and listeners have is a set of such principles; what they do in a particular conversation is draw on that set. It is also sometimes said that conversations are *locally managed*, i.e., they actually proceed without any conscious plan and the participants simply rely on using the principles that are available to them to achieve any wider objectives they have.

#### Adjacency pair

One particularly important principle used in conversation is the *adjacency* pair. Utterance types of certain kinds are found to co-occur: a greeting leads to a return of greeting; a summons leads to a response; a question leads to an answer; a request or offer leads to an acceptance or refusal; a complaint leads to an apology or some kind of rejection; a statement leads to some kind of confirmation or recognition; a compliment leads to

acceptance or rejection; a farewell leads to a farewell; and so on. This basic pairing relationship provides the possibilities of both continuity and exchange in that it enables both parties to say something and for these somethings to be related. It also allows for options in the second member of each pair and for a kind of chaining effect.

A question can lead to an answer, which can lead to a comment, which can lead to an acknowledgment and so on. The ring of a telephone (summons) can lead to a response ('Hello') with the rising intonation of a question, which thus requires an answer, and so on. These are purely linear chains. But, there can be other types of chain, as when a question—answer or topic—comment routine is included as a sub-routine into some other pair.

It has proved possible to plot the structure of many conversations using these ideas of pairing and chaining in order to show how dependent we are on them. We can also show this same dependence by acknowledging what happens when there are violations: not responding to a question; not offering a comment when one is solicited; not acknowledging a request; not exchanging a greeting; and so on. These violations tend to disrupt conversations or to require explanations.

For example, if your telephone keeps ringing when I dial your number, I will tend to assume that you are out rather than that my summons is being ignored. There is actually some controversy over whether there is such a basic two-part exchange. Another view holds that a basic 'exchange' has three parts: 'initiation,' 'response,' and 'feedback.' In this view, unless some form of feedback occurs, the total exchange is incomplete.

#### Turn-taking

Conversation is a cooperative activity also in the sense that it involves two or more parties, each of whom must be allowed the opportunity to participate. Consequently, there must be some principles which govern who gets to speak, i.e., principles of *turn-taking*. Turn-taking in conversation is much more complex than it might appear because we engage in it so easily and skillfully. Turn-taking may actually vary by cultural group. Tannen (1987) identifies a New York conversational style which she labels as 'conversational overlap.' She claims that New Yorkers like a lot of talk going on in casual conversation to the extent that they talk while others are talking. In a later book (1994), she calls this kind of simultaneous speech 'cooperative overlapping'.

There are also certain linguistic and other signals that go with turn-taking. Speakers may signal when they are about to give up a turn in any one of several ways, or by some combination (Duncan, 1972). The final syllable or final stressed syllable of an utterance may be prolonged. The pitch level of the voice may signal closure, for example, by dropping in level on the final syllable. An utterance may be deliberately closed syntactically to achieve a sense of completeness.

Words or expressions like 'actually', 'you know' or 'something' can also be used to indicate a turn-point. Finally, the body itself, or part of it, may signal closure: a relaxing of posture; a gesture with a hand; or directing one's gaze at the listener. Such cues signal completion and allow the listener to take a turn. They signal what has been called a 'transition relevant place.' We must be alert to such places if we want to take a turn. Of course, such places also offer the speaker the opportunity to select the next speaker.

If pairing and turn-taking are integral parts of all conversations, they are so by virtue of the fact that we can identify a certain kind of language activity as conversation and particular instances as specific conversations. Conversations must also have ways of getting started, have some recognizable core or substance to them, i.e., topic or topics, as well as ways of arriving at a conclusion. Each conversation must be recognizable as an instance of the genre; however, what makes each recognizable is not its content but rather its form.

The beginning of a conversation will generally involve an exchange of greetings. A telephone conversation may involve an exchange of 'Hello'; a meeting between strangers might require an exchange of 'How do you do' followed by some kind of self-identification; a meeting between very intimate acquaintances who spend much time together may have its own special ritualistic beginning. Note that much of this preliminary part of a conversation is highly prescribed by cultural setting: how you answer the telephone varies from group to group; greeting exchanges involving the use of names or address terms vary enormously; who speaks first, what a suitable reply is, and even what variety of language is employed may also be tightly constrained by circumstances.

Nonetheless, most investigators agree that what actually constitutes a *topic* in a conversation is not at all clear. Brown and Yule (1983) discuss this issue as follows: it is a feature of a lot of conversation that 'topics' are not fixed beforehand, but are negotiated in the process of conversing. Throughout a conversation, the next 'topic' of conversation is developing. Each speaker contributes to the conversation in terms of both the existing topic framework and his or her personal topic.

Sometimes, side sequences act as *repairs*, i.e., corrections of some kind of 'trouble' that arises during the course of conversation, that trouble coming from any one of a variety of factors. 'Excuse me' is sometimes interjected by a listener into a speaker's words in an attempt to seek some kind of clarification: this is other-initiated repair. Self-repair occurs when the speaker seeks to clarify in some way what is being said and not being understood.

Conversations must also be brought to a close (see Aston, 1995). Quite often the close itself is ritualistic, e.g., an exchange of 'Goodbye'. But such rituals do not come unannounced: they are often preceded by clear indications that closings are about to occur. All topics have been exhausted

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and nothing more remains to be said, but it is not quite the time to exchange farewells. It is into such places that you fit *pre-closing signals* which serve to negotiate the actual closing.

Such signals can involve an expression like 'Well, I think that's all,' or a brief, deliberate summary of some earlier agreement, or a personal exchange like 'Give my regards to your wife,' or they may take the form of a gesture or a physical movement such as rising from a chair or adjusting your posture in some way. Such signals indicate that the conversation is being closed with final closure waiting only for a ritual exchange. Once conversationalists arrive at the pre-closing stage, specific acknowledgment of that fact must be made if somehow the conversation does not actually proceed to close: 'Oh, by the way; I've just remembered,' or 'Something else has just occurred to me.'

An actual closing may involve several steps: the closing down of a topic, e.g., 'So that's agreed' or 'One o'clock, then' repeated by the other party or acknowledged in some form; then possibly some kind of pre-closing exchange, e.g., 'Okay-Okay'; a possible further acknowledgment of the nature of the exchange, e.g., 'Good to see you,' 'Thanks again,' or 'See you soon'; and finally an exchange of farewells, e.g., 'Bye-Bye.' The following is an example of such a closing:

A: So, that's agreed?

B: Yep, agreed.

A: Good, I knew you would.

B: Yes, no problem really.

A: Thanks for the help.

B: Don't mention it.

A: Okay, I'll be back soon.

B: Okay, then, Bye. Take care.

A: Bye.

Pre-closing signals may indeed be regarded as a sub-variety of *mitigating* expressions used in conversation. Such expressions serve the twofold function of keeping conversation going in a systematic manner and doing so while allowing the conversationalists to preserve either the reality or the appearance of cooperation. For example, a pre-request to a secretary might take the following form:

A: Are you doing anything important right now?

B: No, not really.

A: Okay, then, can you do this letter for me? I need it in a hurry.

Consequently, we ask if we can make a request; or we negotiate a closing; or we question someone's veracity, but, in doing so, we carefully tone down our doubts about the truthfulness of what we are being told. We observe the decencies of linguistic behavior, choosing our words to match the circumstances. Those circumstances tell us that a particular conversation is but one in a long stream of conversations that will fill our lives. If we want to keep that stream flowing, and most of us do, we have to work with others and constantly address issues of face and politeness.

Boxer (2002) provides a very short conversation that illustrates many of the points just made. Two female students pass each other on campus on the way to class:

A: Hey, how are you doing?

B: Fine, how about you? Going to class?

A: Calculus, I hate it! (keeps moving)

B: Ugh! Well, catch you later.

A: Yeah, see you at the meeting.

Here, we have various pairings, including a greeting and a farewell, and a topic briefly raised and dealt with, and all this done in a mutually supportive way.

Strange or unusual conversations may be so described because of the way in which they violate, fail to employ, or exploit one or more of the principles mentioned above. For example, a monolog does not allow for turn-taking; talking to oneself involves turn-taking without the usual accompanying exchange of speaker and listener; and an aside in a speech within a play is a particular kind of side-sequence employed as a stage convention.

However, there are conversational settings that are unusual in still other ways. Because of the way in which certain of the principles are used, particular types of conversation may be given quite specific names: for example, teaching, interviewing, or interrogating. That is, in certain circumstances some of the principles we customarily use in conversation are not used at all, or are used in special ways, or are used in an 'abnormal' manner.

The use of language in the classroom by teachers and students provides a good example. Most teaching involves a lot of talk, but classroom talk is dominated by the teacher, who selects topics, sees that participants stick to the chosen topics, and decides how these will be discussed and who will be allowed, even nominated, to discuss them. The teacher has special rights and also has the power to control much of what happens in the classroom.

As Coulthard (1977) says, verbal interaction inside the classroom differs markedly from desultory conversation in that its main purpose is to instruct and inform, and this difference is reflected in the structure of the discourse. In conversation, topic changes are unpredictable and uncontrollable, for . . . a speaker can even talk 'on topic' without talking on the topic intended by the previous speaker. Inside the classroom it is one of the functions of the teacher to choose the topic, decide how it will be subdivided into smaller units, and cope with digressions and misunderstandings.

Moreover, the teacher gets to ask most of the questions, and, on the whole, these questions are of a very special kind: they are usually questions to which the teacher already has the answer. The questions are quite often addressed to a whole group of listeners and individuals in that group are required to bid for the right to answer. Furthermore, when someone is chosen to answer the question, the whole answering ritual is gone through for the benefit of all participants, not just for the benefit of the one who asked the question.

Finally, the questioner actually evaluates the answer as one which is not only right in providing the information that was sought but also right in relation to how the teacher is seeking to develop the topic. The conversation can also be made topical, as responses can be judged for their quality, quantity, and appropriateness (or lack of it).

Classroom conversational activity is very highly marked, for any of the above activities carried over to ordinary everyday conversation would result in strong objections by 'innocent' parties in such conversation: they would feel that they were being manipulated. Classroom conversation is different from ordinary conversation in the sense that the teacher may be said to 'own' the conversation, whereas in ordinary conversations such ownership may be said to be shared. You own a conversation when you control such matters as topic selection, turn-taking, and even beginnings and endings. In such circumstances there is also a reduction of local management, that is, the need to work things out in conversation as you proceed. Classroom conversations have officially appointed managers, just like coronations, parliamentary debates, religious services, court hearings, and so on.

Teachers actually get to comment on the contributions of others with the intent of making such contributions fit a predetermined pattern. We can try to imagine what would happen if we attempted to manage an ordinary conversation in such a manner: if we insisted on selecting topics and saw

that others keep to them and to our definitions of them; decided who was to speak and for how long, and interrupted as we felt the urge; began or ended the talk to meet our own goals or external demands, such as bells and recesses; and told X that what he said was irrelevant, Y that what she said was just repeating W, and asked Z to summarize what A and B said, and then expressed our approval (or disapproval) of the result. Children must learn about such ownership, and that learning may not be at all easy.

### 5.3 SPEECH EVENTS

Speech acts and speech events relate to language performance in society. Every aspect of language use has a function. This is where linguists have paid attention to individual use of language in society in terms of meaning and usage. Linguists do tend to be better informed than most about the situations in which linguistic groups find themselves. Linguists are generally considered well-equipped for analysing the situations in which minority languages are spoken and for defending the rights of minority groups than other professionals.

Linguists seem to be fully aware of the extent to which the question of whether or not a linguistic variety is a language (as opposed to a dialect) is a truly linguistic matter at all. They are well placed to defend linguistic minorities against attacks which are aimed at the linguistic status of their mother-tongue.

The speech act and speech event are the locus of most sociolinguistic and anthropological-linguistic research, indeed all linguistic research that is accountable to a body of naturally-occurring speech or signed data. They represent the social and linguistic boundaries within which analysts locate, and seek to describe and account for language variation and change, ways of speaking and patterns of choice among elements in a linguistic repertoire.

It is thus on a par with other basic notions such as 'language', 'dialect' or 'grammar' as a primary object of description and theorising in our

discipline. They both grapple with speech situations in the community focused on shared ways of speaking which go beyond language boundaries or language bond', involving relatedness at the level of linguistic form – both of which emphasise the production of speech itself over perception or attitudes.

### LEARNING ACTIVITY 5.2

Speech acts and speech events relate to language application in every society. Explain.

### Note:

- a) Write your answer in the space given below.
- b) Check the answer with your academic counsellor.

As mentioned earlier, speech acts are the routine ways of speaking; utterances that involve both language and social information like promise, argue, joke, utter, dare, curse, disdain etc. In this theory, it is believed that every speech or language use has a function to perform in the place and time of usage.

We also mentioned about the important categories as under:

- i) Locutionary acts are simply acts of uttering sounds, syllables, words, phrases, and sentences from a language. From a speech act point of view, these are not very interesting; because an utterance act *per se* is not communicative (a parrot can do one).
- ii) Illocutionary acts are performed in doing something with an utterance.
- iii) Perlocutionary acts are performed by producing an effect on the hearer with an utterance.
- iv) *Propositional acts* have to do with the content of utterances, the basic acts of referring and predicating, wherein a speaker refers to something and then characterises it.

Illocutionary acts can often be successfully performed simply by uttering the right sentence, with the right intentions and beliefs, and under the right circumstances, e.g., I (hereby) order you to leave; I (hereby) promise to pay and I (hereby) appoint you chairman.

If you recall, we said that unlike perlocutionary acts, illocutionary acts are central to communication. Our conversations are composed of statements, suggestions, requests, proposals, greetings and the like. When we do perform perlocutionary acts such as persuading or intimidating, we do so by performing illocutionary acts such as stating or threatening. Illocutionary acts have the feature that one performs them simply by getting one's illocutionary intentions recognised.

The concept of speech event relates to social interactional events involving communication; how speech resources of the community are largely put to use. This theory was propounded by Dell Hymes (1972). According to Hymes, the components of a speech event are:

Setting: This is the scene or situation where interaction takes place.
 It is the spatial contact point for the application of language. It is the society where the linguistic forms are applied.

- Participants: These are the speakers, receivers and the other
  participants in the speech situation. Since language is functional as a
  means of communication among people, it brings people together
  and they understand each other by that means.
- **Ends:** These are the outcomes and goals of each speech situation. Every communication process has a target, a goal to achieve.
- Act sequences: These are the forms and contents of speech situations. This includes the message being communicated and the means of such communication whether oral or written, formal or informal.
- Key: This is the manner of speech events. This has to do with the way
  that communication is effected, whether it is through discussion,
  discourse or performance.
- Instrumentalities: This is the channel or code of communication. This has to do with what is used in effecting the communication. Does the communication have to do with a computer, radio, audiovisual instrument or telephone?
- Norms: These are behaviours and interpretations given to speech events. This has to do with the reactions given to the thing being communicated. Did the people involved scream, shout, cry or laugh?
  - **Genre:** This is the style of communication in the speech situation. This has to do with the process of the communication like lecture, chat, discussion, etc.

### **SUMMARY**

In this Unit, we introduced you to the concept of speech community and speech acts. In this context, we described speech community, which is an important concept in sociolinguistics, as a more or less discrete group of people who use language in a unique and mutually accepted way among themselves. We also discussed the topic of speech community elaborately by referring to such concepts as linguistic communities, intersecting communities and community networks and repertoires. Subsequently, we discussed speech acts by explaining the concepts of illocutionary functions, cooperation and conversation. We closed the Unit by touching upon the concept of speech events.

# **UNIT 6**

## Language and Gender

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### Overview

### **Learning Objectives**

- 6.1 Social Bias
- 6.2 Language Aspects: Differences
  - 6.2.1 Difference in word choice
  - 6.2.2 Grammatical patterns
- 6.3 Plausible Situations
  - 6.3.1 Cross-gender conversations
  - 6.3.2 Same-gender conversations
- 6.4 Can Language Be Sexist?
  - 6.4.1 Socialization/Acculturation
  - 6.4.2 Community of practice
- 6.5 Gender Differences and Social Demands

### Summary

### **OVERVIEW**

The perceived connection between syntax, semantics, vocabularies, etc., and the ways of using particular languages and the social roles of the men and women, who speak these languages, is emerging as one of the major topics in sociolinguistics. In other words, do the men and women who speak a particular language use it in different ways? If they do, do these differences arise from the structure of that language? Or, alternatively, do

any differences that exist simply reflect the ways in which the sexes relate to each other in that society? Is it possible to describe a particular language as 'sexist', or should we reserve such a description for those who use that language? If the answer to either these questions is in the affirmative, what could and should be done?

These issues generated a considerable amount of thought and discussion in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and many are still unresolved. They are also very emotional issues for many who have chosen either to write on them or to discuss them, and that they should be so is quite understandable. The literature on these issues is now vast; it has been one of the biggest growth areas within sociolinguistics in recent years.

Keeping these in view, in this Unit, we will explain some of the underlying facts relating to the language and gender discourse with a view to avoiding the kinds of rhetoric and dialectic that characterize much of the discussion of sexism in language. We will begin this Unit by explaining the impact of social bias on language use. What is implied is that men's and women's speech differ because boys and girls are brought up differently and men and women often fill different roles in society. Moreover, most men and women know this and behave accordingly. In other words, child-rearing practices and role differentiations would help make the use of language less sexist. We will then discuss the male-female differences in the choice of words and grammatical patterns, again as a consequence of societal norms. Subsequently, we will highlight how language use in cross-gender and same-gender situations differs. In this Unit, we will also take up for discussion the basic question as to whether language can be sexist. We will close the Unit by pointing out the fact that societies create differences among themselves, and as a consequence language also gets gendered.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing the Unit, you should be able to:

• Discuss the impact of social bias on language use.

- Illustrate the male-female language differences with regard to choice words and grammatical patterns.
- Explain cross-gender and same-gender conversation situations.
- Argue as to whether or not language can be sexist.
- Discuss the relation between society and language use.

### 6.1 SOCIAL BIAS

At the outset, it is essential for us to understand that we use the term 'gender' in this Unit primarily because it is a social construct unlike the term 'sex' which connotes biological connect.

Gender is also something we cannot avoid; it is part of the way in which societies are ordered around us, with each society doing that ordering differently. As Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) say: "The force of gender categories in society makes it impossible for us to move through our lives in a non-gendered way and impossible not to behave in a way that brings out gendered behavior in others." Gender is a key component of identity.

That there are differences between men and women is hardly a matter of dispute. Females have two X chromosomes whereas males have one X and one Y chromosomes. This is a key genetic difference and no geneticist regards that difference as unimportant. On average, females have more fat and less muscle than males, are not as strong, and weigh less. They also mature more rapidly and live longer. The female voice usually has different characteristics from the male voice, and often females and males exhibit different ranges of verbal skills. Of course, we must acknowledge that many of the differences are the result of different socialization practices.

For example, women may live longer than men because of the different roles they play in society and the different jobs they tend to fill. Differences in voice quality may be accentuated by beliefs about what men and women should sound like when they talk, and any differences in verbal skills may be explained in great part through differences in upbringing. We have very often heard that there is far more reading failure in schools among boys than girls. But, this does not mean that boys are inherently less well equipped in learning to read. We may ascribe their relatively poor performance to sociocultural factors and not genetic ones.

Numerous observers have described women's speech as being different from that of men. In this context, one would suggest that there is a bias element here. That is, typically, men's speech is used as a norm against which women's speech is judged. Some hold the view that women's speech is trivial, gossip-laden, corrupt, illogical, idle, euphemistic, or deficient, is highly suspect, etc. Nor is it necessarily more precise, cultivated, or stylish or even less profane than men's speech.

However, such judgments lack solid evidentiary support. For example, apparently men do gossip just as much as women do, but men's gossip is just different. Men indulge in a kind of phatic small talk that involves insults, challenges and various kinds of negative behaviour to do exactly what women do by their use of nurturing, polite, feedback-laden, cooperative talk. In doing this, they achieve the kind of solidarity they prize. It is the norms of behaviour that are different.

In the linguistic literature perhaps the most famous example of gender differentiation is found in the Lesser Antilles of the West Indies among the Carib Indians. Male and female Caribs have been reported to speak different languages, the result of a long-ago conquest in which a group of invading Carib-speaking men killed the local Arawak-speaking men and took their women. The descendants of these Carib-speaking men and Arawak-speaking women have sometimes been described as having different languages for men and women because boys learn Carib from their fathers and girls learn Arawak from their mothers. However, this claim of two separate languages is now discounted.

What differences there are actually do not result in two separate or different languages, but rather one language with noticeable gender-based characteristics. Phonological differences between the speech of men and women have been noted in a variety of languages. Moreover, any use of female pronunciations by males is likely to be regarded as a sign of effeminacy.

There is also a very interesting example from English of a woman being advised to speak more like a man in order to fill a position previously filled only by men. Margaret Thatcher, the former Prime Minister of the UK, was told that her voice did not match her position as British Prime Minister and that she sounded too 'shrill.' She was advised to lower the pitch of her voice, diminish its range, and speak more slowly, and thereby adopt an authoritative, almost monotonous delivery to make herself heard.

In the area of morphology and vocabulary, many of the studies have focused on English. Lakoff (1973) claims that women use colour words like mauve, beige, aquamarine, lavender, and magenta but most men do not. She also maintains that adjectives such as adorable, charming, divine, lovely, and sweet are also commonly used by women but only very rarely by men. Women are also said to have their own vocabulary for emphasizing certain effects on them, words and expressions such as so good, such fun, exquisite, lovely, divine, precious, adorable, darling, and fantastic.

Furthermore, the English language makes certain distinctions of a gender-based kind, e.g., actor-actress, waiter-waitress, and master-mistress. Some of these distinctions are reinforced by entrenched patterns of usage and semantic development. For example, master and mistress have developed quite different ranges of use and meaning, so that whereas Josephine can be described as Fred's mistress, Fred cannot be described as Josephine's master. Similarly, one could say that 'She's Fred's widow,' but you cannot say 'He's Sally's widower.' Other pairs of words which reflect

similar differentiation are boy-girl, man-woman, gentleman-lady, bachelor-spinster, and even widower-widow.

Lakoff cites numerous examples and clearly establishes her point that 'equivalent' words referring to men and women do have quite different associations in English. A particularly telling example is the difference between 'He's a professional' and 'She's a professional.'

There is now a greater awareness that subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, distinctions are made in the choice of vocabulary used to describe men and women. Consequently, we can understand why there is a frequent insistence that neutral words be used as much as possible, as in describing occupations, e.g., *chairperson*, *letter carrier*, *salesclerk* and *actor* (as in 'She's an actor').

If language tends to reflect social structure and social structure is changing, so that judgeships, surgical appointments, nursing positions, and primary school teaching assignments are just as likely to be held by women as men (or by men as women), such changes might be expected to follow inevitably. This kind of work does two things: it draws our attention to existing inequities, and it encourages us to make the necessary changes by establishing new categorizations (e.g., Ms), and suggesting modifications for old terms (e.g., changing *policeman* to *police officer* and *chairman* to *chairperson*). However, there is still considerable doubt that changing *waitress* to either *waiter* or *waitperson* or describing Padmini as an actor rather than as an actress indicates a real shift in sexist attitudes.

Romaine (1999) is of the view that 'attitudes toward gender equality did not match language usage. Those who had adopted more gender-inclusive language did not necessarily have a more liberal view of gender inequities in language.' One particular bit of sexism in languages that has aroused much comment is the gender systems that so many of them have, the *he-she-it* 'natural' gender system of English or the *le-la* or *der-die-das* 'grammatical' gender systems of French and German. The possible

connections between gender systems (masculine, feminine, neuter) and gender differences (male, female, neither) are various.

Romaine argues that languages with gender distinctions cannot be sexist, and it is the people who use languages who are or who are not sexist. Chinese, Japanese, Persian, and Turkish do not make the kinds of gender distinctions English makes through its system of pronouns, but it would be difficult to maintain that males who speak these languages are less sexist than males who speak English!

### LEARNING ACTIVITY 6.1

Explain the impact of social bias on language use.

### Note:

- a) Write your answer in the space given below.
- b) Check the answer with your academic counsellor.

### **6.2 LANGUAGE AREAS: DIFFERENCES**

We will look at some of the evidence that there are gender differences in language use.

### 6.2.1 Differences in word choices

Different languages do seem to prescribe different forms for use by men and women. Consider the following examples in this context:

### Japanese

There certainly are gender differences in word choice in various languages. Japanese women show they are women when they speak, for example, by the use of a sentence-final particle *ne* or another particle *wa*. In Japanese, too, a male speaker refers to himself as *boku* or *ore* whereas a female uses *watasi* or *atasi*. Whereas a man says *boku kaeru* 'I will go back' in plain or informal speech, a woman says *watasi kaeru wa* (Takahara, 1991). Children learn to make these distinctions very early in life. But, girls have already started using 'boku'.

### Thai

In a polite conversation situation, a female speaker of Thai refers to herself as dichAn whereas a man uses  $pho \check{m}$ . In Thai, too, women emphasize a repeated action through reduplication, i.e., by repeating the verb, whereas men place a descriptive verb, mak, after the verb instead.

The taboos often have to do with certain kinship relationships or with hunting or with some religious practice and result in the avoidance of certain words or even sounds in words. They derive from the social organization of the particular group involved and reflect basic concerns of the group. Such concerns quite often lead to women being treated in ways that appear inimical to egalitarian-oriented outsiders.

### 6.2.2 Grammatical matters

When we turn to certain grammatical matters in English, we find that the intonation patterns of men and women vary somewhat – women using certain patterns associated with surprise and politeness more often than men. In the same vein, Lakoff says that women may answer a question with a statement that employs the rising intonation pattern usually associated with a question rather than the falling intonation pattern associated with making a firm statement.

According to Lakoff, women do this because they are less sure about themselves and their opinions than are men. For the same reason, she says that women often add tag questions to statements, e.g., 'They caught the robber last week, didn't they?' Though there are arguments for and against this, some studies have revealed that the gender of the addressee is an important variable in determining how a speaker phrased a particular question.

Still other gender-linked differences are said to exist. Women and men may have different paralinguistic systems and move and gesture differently. The suggestion has been made that these often require women to appear to be submissive to men. Women are also often named, titled and addressed differently from men. Women are more likely than men to be addressed by their first names when everything else is equal, or, if not by first names, by such terms as *lady*, *miss*, or *dear* and even *baby* or *babe*. Women are said to be subject to a wider range of address terms than men, and men are more familiar with them than with other men.

Women are also said not to employ the profanities and obscenities men use, or, if they do, use them in different circumstances or are judged differently for using them. Women are also sometimes required to be silent in situations in which men may speak. Among the Araucanian Indians of Chile, men are encouraged to talk on all occasions, but the ideal wife is

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silent in the presence of her husband, and at gatherings where men are present she should talk only in a whisper, if she talks at all.

However, it is important for us to note that some writers do not subscribe to the kinds of findings reported earlier. Nonetheless, there is no gainsaying the fact that there indeed are differences in gendered speech. Some are real but others are almost imaginary. Any differences that do exist surely also must interact with other factors, e.g., social class, race, culture, discourse type, group membership, etc.

In setting out a list of what she calls 'sociolinguistic universal tendencies,' Holmes (1998) offers five testable claims as under:

- 1. Women and men develop different patterns of language use.
- 2. Women tend to focus on the affective functions of an interaction more often than men do.
- 3. Women tend to use linguistic devices that stress solidarity more often than men do.
- 4. Women tend to interact in ways which will maintain and increase solidarity, while (especially in formal contexts) men tend to interact in ways which will maintain and increase their power and status.
- 5. Women are stylistically more flexible than men. It is through testing claims such as these that we are likely to refine our understanding of those matters that interest us.

In the next section we will look more closely at some possible explanations for the differences. We will also try to avoid examining women's speech in relation to men's speech as though the latter provides the norm.

### LEARNING ACTIVITY 6.2

Give 2 examples each for word choice and grammatical patterns to illustrate the difference in the use of language between males and females. .

### Note:

- a) Write your answer in the space given below.
- b) Check the answer with your academic counsellor.

### **6.3 PLAUSIBLE SITUATIONS**

When we turn to matters having to do with how men and women use language in a wider sense in the context of social interaction and to achieve certain ends, we find clues to possible explanations for the differences we encounter.

### 6.3.1 Cross-gender conversations

In conversations involving both men and women many researchers agree that men speak more than women do. One also found that when men talked to men, the content categories of such talk focused on competition and teasing, sports, aggression and doing things. On the other hand, when women talked to women, the equivalent categories were the self, feelings, affiliation with others, home and family. Women are also reported to use more polite forms and more compliments than men. In doing so, they are said to be seeking to develop solidarity with others in order to maintain social relationships. (Some may argue that this by itself is sexist in nature!) On the other hand, men are likely to use talk to get things done. However, these are tendencies only; men also try to bond and women also try to move others to action.

Mills (2003) contests the view that women are more polite than men. She says that 'politeness' is not a property of utterances; it is rather 'a set of practices or strategies which communities of practice develop, affirm, and contest'.

When the two genders interact, some studies show that though men may tend to take the initiative in conversation, they may incline to be accommodative so far as topics are concerned. While they may also speak less aggressively and competitively, women reduce the amount of talk about home and family. However, as the analysis of a study shows this cannot be generalized. For example, a thorough review of the literature by James and Drakich (1993) shows inconsistency in the findings when fifty-six studies of talk either within or between genders were examined. They found that the important factor in determining who talked (more, or less) depends on the context and the structure of the social interaction within which gender differences are observed. They further found the following:

In their review, James and Drakich further found that women are expected to use and do use talk to a greater extent than men to serve the function of establishing and maintaining personal relationships. What is particularly important in female friendships is the sharing of intimate feelings and confidences through talk, whereas in male friendships the sharing of activities is more important.

Another interesting claim is that in cross-gender conversations men frequently interrupt women but women much less frequently interrupt men (Zimmerman and West, 1975). James and Clarke (1993) looked at fifty-four studies that addressed the claim that men are much more likely than women 'to use interruption as a means of dominating and controlling interactions.' They report that the majority of studies have found no significant differences between genders in this respect and both men and women interrupt other men and women.

However, according to James and Clarke, females may use interruptions of the cooperative and rapport-building type to a greater extent than do males, at least in some circumstances. Still another claim is that there is evidence that in cross-gender conversation women ask more questions than men, encourage others to speak, use more back-channeling signals like *mhmm* to encourage others to continue speaking, use more instances of *you* and *we*, and do not protest as much as men when they are interrupted.

On the other hand, men interrupt more, challenge, dispute and ignore more, try to control what topics are discussed, and are inclined to make categorical statements. Such behaviours are not characteristic of women in conversations that involve both men and women. In other words, in their interactional patterns in conversation, men and women seem often to exhibit the power relationship that exists in society, with men dominant and women subservient.

If different behaviours are sometimes found in cross-gender communication, what do we find within same-gender groups?

### 6.3.2 Same-gender conversations

Coates (1996) discusses conversation among women friends, and her analysis comes from the recorded conversation among women interacting socially in small groups. Coates admits that she is no longer a 'dispassionate investigator' of language. She is a middle-class woman and feminist, and an ethnographer who puts women at the center of her work. She says that her work shows that among the groups she looked at 'friendships with women are a constant in women's lives.' In such conversations, women tell and exchange stories, constantly hedge what they say, use questions to invite others to talk, i.e., for conversational maintenance and often repeat what others say. Such talk is collaborative and establishes a feeling of solidarity among those who use it.

In still another study, this time one that used an experimental setting, Freed and Greenwood (1996) recorded and analyzed the casual conversations of eight same-sex pairs of friends, four male and four female, each conversation lasting about thirty-five minutes. They focused particularly on the use of 'you know' and questions. The setting of each of the 35-minute conversations was manipulated so that each conversation provided a period of 'spontaneous' talk, one of 'considered' talk, and finally one of 'collaborative' talk. Freed and Greenwood found no differences in the use of you know and questions: "Women and men of the same speech community, speaking in same-sex pairs in the same conversational context, with equal access to the conversational floor, do not differ either in the frequency of the use of you know or in the number of questions uttered".

Women and men also use *you know* and questions for the same purposes. It is the linguistic task or the speaking situation that determines the style of speaking *not* the gender of the speaker. They further add that just as the communicative style of women has been overly stereotyped as cooperative, so too the verbal style of men has been over-generalized as competitive and lacking in cooperativeness.

# Give samples of cross-gender and same-gender conversations. Note: a) Write your answer in the space given below. b) Check the answer with your academic counsellor.

### **6.4 CAN LANGUAGE BE SEXIST?**

When we do observe gender differences in language behaviour, we face the task of trying to explain them. One explanation is that languages can be sexist. In this context, let us consider the following three claims:

1. **Biological differences**: Men and women are biologically different and that this difference has serious consequences for gender. Women are somehow predisposed psychologically to be involved with one another and to be mutually supportive and noncompetitive. On the other hand, men are innately predisposed to

independence and to vertical rather than horizontal relationships. There appears to be, however, little or no evidence for this claim. It seems rather to be a clear case of stereotyping, which offers no more than a facile solution to a difficult problem.

2. Social structure/Power relations: Social organization is best perceived as some kind of hierarchical set of power relationships. Moreover, such organization by power may appear to be entirely normal, justified both genetically and evolutionarily and, therefore, natural and possibly even preordained. Language behaviour reflects male dominance. Men use what power they have to dominate each other and, of course, women, and, if women are to succeed in such a system, they must learn to dominate others too, women included. Men constantly try to take control, to specify topics, to interrupt, and so on.

They do it with each other and they do it with women, who, feeling powerless, let them get away with it, preferring instead to seek support from other women. Consequently, since women are relatively powerless they opt for more prestigious language forms to protect themselves in dealing with the more powerful. At the same time the use of such forms serves to mark them off from equally powerless males of the same social class. Women may also have weaker social networks than men but they show a greater sensitivity to language forms, especially standard ones.

Lakoff (1975) adopts the position that men are dominant and women lack power. Women may have to behave more like men, if this unequal relationship is to be changed. Crawford (1995) too declares that power relations best explain what happens when men and women interact linguistically. However, Talbot (1998) makes a cautious note when he says, "A major determinant [of the dominance framework] is that male dominance is often treated as though it is pan-contextual. But, all men are not in a position to

dominate all women." Furthermore, anthropologists have pointed out that women have never been without power and they, in fact, effectively control some societies.

3. **Dominance**: Men and women are social beings who have learned to act in certain ways. Language behaviour is largely learned behaviour. Men learn to be men and women learn to be women, linguistically speaking. Society subjects them to different life experiences. Instead of 'dominance' some refer to this claim as difference or deficit) view. They conclude that women and men observe different rules in conversing and that in cross-gender talk the rules often conflict. For example, the 'mhmm' a woman uses quite frequently, for example, means only 'I'm listening,' whereas the 'mhmm' a man uses, but much less frequently, tends to mean 'I'm agreeing.' Consequently, men often believe that 'women are always agreeing with them and then conclude that it's impossible to tell what a woman really thinks,' whereas 'women . . . get upset with men who never seem to be listening.'

The genders have different views of what questioning is all about, women viewing questions as part of conversational maintenance and men primarily as requests for information; different conventions for linking; different views of what is or is not 'aggressive' linguistic behaviour, with women regarding any sign of aggression as personally directed, negative, and disruptive, and men as just one way of organizing a conversation; different views of topic flow and topic shift; and different attitudes toward problemsharing and advice-giving, with women tending to discuss, share, and seek reassurance, and men tending to look for solutions, give advice, and even lecture to their audiences.

Tannen (1998) shows how girls and boys are brought up differently. Accordingly to her, part of the socialization process is learning not only gender-related activities and attitudes but gender related language behaviour.

### 6.4.1 Socialization and Acculturation

Gender differences in language become established early and are then used to support the kinds of social behaviour males and females exhibit. It is mainly when males and females interact that the behaviour each uses separately becomes noticeable. As Holmes (1992) points out, the differences between women and men in ways of interacting may be the result of different socialisation and acculturation patterns. And, the kind of miscommunication which occurs between women and men will be attributable to the different expectations each sex has of the function of the interaction, and the ways it is appropriately conducted.

One consequence of such differences is that women's speech has often been devalued by men. Tannen (1993) believes that men and women should try to understand why they speak as they do and try to adapt to each other's styles.

### 6.4.2 Community of practice

Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1998) provide another explanation in the concept of 'community of practice'. They explain this concept as follows:

A community of practice is an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in some common endeavor. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations – in short, practices – emerge in the course of their joint activity around that endeavor. A community of practice is different as a social construct from the traditional notion of community, primarily because it is defined simultaneously by its membership and by the practice in which that membership engages. Indeed, it is the practices

of the community and members' differentiated participation in them that structures the community socially.

They root their explanation by stating that gender issues are essentially complex and cannot easily be separated from other community issues. In other words, in order to understand what is happening when people acquire and use language, we must try to understand the various communities of practice in which people function.

They deplore the fact that too often, gender is abstracted whole from other aspects of social identity; the linguistic system is abstracted from linguistic practice; language is abstracted from social action; interactions and events are abstracted from community and personal history; difference and dominance are each abstracted from wider social practice, and both linguistic and social behaviour are abstracted from the communities in which they occur.

They further add that various kinds of differences arise in such circumstances, including gender differences: "gender is . . . produced and reproduced in differential forms of participation in particular communities of practice. . . . The relations among communities of practice when they come together in overarching communities of practice also produce gender arrangements". Individuals participate in various communities of practice and these communities interact in various ways with other communities.

Many of the suggestions for avoiding sexist language are admirable, but some, as Lakoff points out with regard to changing *history* to *herstory*, are absurd. Many changes can be made quite easily: *early humans* (from *early man*); *salesperson* (from *salesman*); *ordinary people* (from *the common man*); and *women* (from *the fair sex*). But other aspects of language may be more resistant to change, e.g., the *he-she* distinction.

Languages themselves may not be sexist. Men and women use language to achieve certain purposes, and so long as differences in gender are equated

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with differences in access to power and influence in society, we may expect linguistic differences too. For both men and women, power and influence are also associated with education, social class, regional origin, and so on, and there is no question in these cases that there are related linguistic differences.

# Are languages inherently sexist? Note:

# a) Write your answer in the space given below.b) Check the answer with your academic counsellor.

# 6.5 GENDER DIFFERENCES AND SOCIAL DEMANDS

Gender differences in language may be social in origin rather than linguistic we can look at a study of norms and norm-breaking in Malagasy (Keenan, 1974). Among the Malagasy, men do not put others into situations in which they may lose face. They use language subtly, try to

maintain good communication in their relationships, and avoid confrontations. They are discreet, they prefer indirectness as an expression of respect, and they are considered to be able speechmakers: men's 'requests are typically delayed and inexplicit, accusations imprecise, and criticisms subtle.' We should note that many of these characteristics of men's speech might be associated with women's speech in another society. Therefore, how do women speak in Malagasy?

Women do not operate with the same set of rules. They openly and directly express anger toward others. They also criticize and confront, and men use them to do this. They can be direct and straightforward, and because they can be so, they perform tasks, such as interacting with strangers, buying and selling when these require negotiating a price, and reprimanding children, which men prefer not to perform. In this society, then, it is the men who are indirect and the women (and children) who are direct.

But the most interesting fact is that it is indirectness of speech which is prized in Malagasy society and regarded as 'traditional' and it is the men who employ it. On the other hand, 'direct speech . . . is associated with a loss of tradition, with contemporary mores' and it is found among women and children. Women are definitely inferior to men in this society too, for 'where subtlety and delicacy [which are prized characteristics] are required in social situations, men are recruited,' but 'where directness and explicitness [necessary at times but not prized characteristics] are desired in social situations, women are recruited.'

The kinds of evidence we have looked at strongly suggests that men and women differ in the kinds of language they use because men and women often fill distinctly different roles in society. We may expect that the more distinct the roles, the greater the differences and there seems to be some evidence to support such a claim, for the greatest differences appear to exist in societies in which the roles of men and women are most clearly differentiated. Since boys are brought up to behave like men in those

societies and girls to behave like women, the differences are also perpetuated.

In societies that are less rigidly stratified and in which the roles of men and women are less clearly differentiated, we may expect to find a reflection of this situation in the language that is used and also, if change in society is occurring, change in the language too. In other words, most of the language differences can be explained by the different positions men and women fill in society.

Men have more power and may be more assertive; women tend to be kept 'in their place' but aspire quite often to a different and 'better' place. Women, therefore, appear to be more conscious of uses of language which they associate with those they regard as being socially superior. They, therefore, direct their speech towards the models these provide, even to the extent in some cases of hypercorrection. Thus, women tend to be in the vanguard of change towards the norms of the upper classes, and lower middle-class women are at the very front.

One consequence is that sometimes we view the speech of certain women as being hypercorrect. That too is a normative-laden concept. It assumes a correct male norm and characterizes the female norm as deviant. Once again difference rather than deviance might be a better characterization, with the difference arising from the different experiences that females and males have of the world.

Men have power, and this applies to even lower-class men. They are less influenced linguistically by others and, in the case of the lower working class, may seek solidarity through the 'toughness' that non-standard varieties of the language seem to indicate. If they lead in any kind of change, such change may well be away from the norm. However, women may not find appropriate the kinds of solidarity that men seek through the use of a particular language or certain kinds of language. It does not mean

that women are not without solidarity. It is just a different kind of solidarity from that of men and just as normal.

All deliberate attempts to change or modify languages to free them of perceived sexism or make them gender-neutral are a form of language planning. Sometimes the goal appears to be to force language to catch up to social change, and at other times it seems designed to bring about social change through mandating language change.

Whatever it is, this requires us to accept the view of Whorf that interrelationship of language and culture is the cause for all the difficulties of interpretation and implementation.

Some feminists want to go further than 'cleaning up' the language and even deny any possibility of 'neutrality.' Their expressed mission is to 'reclaim' language for themselves.

Spender adopts a Whorfian view of language declaring that language helps form the limits of our reality. It is our means of ordering and manipulating the world. It is through language that we become members of a human community, that the world becomes comprehensible and meaningful, that we bring into existence the world in which we live. However, she goes much further than Whorf, asserting that 'the English language has been literally man-made and . . . is still primarily under male control' and that males, as the dominant group, have produced language, thought, and reality.

Women would require intervention into language use on a grand scale. Any such intervention would have to be based not on any rational view of language behaviour but entirely on ideology. Language and gender studies have seen an interesting development in recent years, known by such terms as *queer linguistics* and *lavender linguistics*. These studies deal with the language of non-mainstream groups such as gays, lesbians, bisexuals, the transgendered, etc., and focus on 'sexuality' rather than sex or gender. In

fact, a major claim is that the focus on sex or gender may have been misdirected.

Cameron and Kulick (2003) adopt a postmodern approach and argue that a concept they call 'desire' should play a central role in trying to understand human behaviour since 'desire' encompasses more than just the preference for partners of the same or the other sex: it also deals with the non-intentional, non-conscious and non-rational dimensions of human sexual life.

The unconscious and irrational aspects of sexuality may not be manifested on the surface of people's behaviour in the same way that their behaviour displays the sexual identities they have consciously chosen ("gay," "lesbian," "straight," etc.)' They argue that the issues of identity and power are less important, an argument that Bucholtz and Hall (2004) reject, claiming that 'desire' is much too vague a concept to be useful and that issues of identity and power are not only relevant but essential in any research on such language varieties. Just what the ultimate significance to the subject matter of this chapter this concern for 'marginalized' groups will have is difficult to predict.

The research has produced some findings of interest to us, e.g., Barrett's study. Ignoring such findings would be to fall into the trap of appearing to use 'power' oppressively. However, only time will tell if this will ultimately prove to be a significant development.

### **SUMMARY**

We began this Unit by explaining the impact of social bias on language use. In this context, we implied that men's and women's speech would differ primarily because boys and girls had generally been brought up differently and men and women often were expected to fill different roles in society. We further said that as most men and women knew about this, they would behave accordingly. Put differently, unless changes in the child-rearing

practices and role differentiations were brought in, the use of language would remain sexist. We then discussed the male-female differences in the choice of words and grammatical patterns, consequent on the existing social expectations and norms. We also highlighted the difference in language use with reference to conversations in the typical cross-gender and same-gender situations. Later, we took up for discussion the question as to whether language can be sexist. We closed the Unit by pointing out the fact that societies would continue to create differences among themselves, and as a consequence language also would continue to get gendered.

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