

# **COURSE PLAN**

## ***FIFTH SEMESTER COURSE IN SOCIOLINGUISTICS FOR LMD STUDENTS OF ENGLISH***

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## **1. Introduction**

By the end of this semester, you will acquire the fundamental concepts that relate humans' knowledge of language, in general, and to the branch of sociolinguistics, in particular.

Language is inextricably related to society on various levels and ways. To understand the function of language in society and the impact society has on language, it is necessary to understand the scientific specialty of sociolinguistics and the objects of study by first reviewing key terms. Language is considered as an evolutionary phenomenon which is continually adapted to the communicative needs of its speakers. It consists largely of rules which determine its use. It is a system of vocal signs with an internal structure and used for the purposes of human communication. It is, then, a social phenomenon that carries a function of transmitting social messages between individuals. Whereas society refers to a group of people who are unified for certain purposes.

The relationship between language and society is a complex one. Language, on the one hand, is a system or means of communication between humans. It can be specific or unique when it relates to particular societies or groups of people who are drawn together for a certain purpose or purposes. On the other hand, a society must have a language or languages in which to carry out its purposes. Moreover, the interconnectedness of language and society is inevitable and has different forms. First, social structure can either influence or determine linguistic structure and/or behavior. Second, linguistic structure and/or behavior may either influence or determine social structure. Third, the influence is bi-directional: language and society may influence each other.

Sociolinguistics is a developing branch of linguistics and sociology. It studies how language is used in society in order to explain and determine the possible reasons for language variation, and understand the process of language change. Sociolinguistics explores how the use of language varies with reference to some social factors (age, sex, gender, class, geography, etc).

This course, therefore, is a new theme for you but is based on some background knowledge you have acquired mainly in Linguistics during your first and second year. Sociolinguistics is an area of linguistics that studies and analyzes language in relation to society. This course permits you to understand how language choices you make are bound to some external factors, through answering the questions: who is speaking?, to whom?, when?, to what end?, and what language (language variety)?. It, also, helps you develop a deep understanding of the scope of Linguistics and Sociolinguistics.

The ‘Sociolinguistics’ course is divided into three broad chapters. By its end, you will acquire the key concepts that underlie the relationship between language and society. You will also develop a deep understanding of the influence of the social variables on linguistic variations. This course, additionally, enables you to distinguish between various sociolinguistic phenomena such as diglossia and code-switching, and the different language varieties: register, slang, taboos... etc.

## **2. Content**

This course of ‘Sociolinguistics’ comprises three chapters or units. The first one is entitled ‘Introduction to Sociolinguistics’. It covers four main points: brief historical background, the relationship between language and society, research in Sociolinguistics, and identity, power and solidarity as basic concepts in sociolinguistics. The second chapter of ‘Language Variations and Dialects’ is devoted to the explanation of the different language varieties. It starts out by providing definitions of key related concepts, namely: variety and vernacular. It, then, examines the difference between language and dialect and the types of dialects. The other part of this chapter is related to an overview of the different varieties of language namely style, register, slang and taboo language. The third chapter entitled “Languages in Contact” deals with the phenomena of bilingualism/multilingualism, diglossia, and code-switching. The last part in this course deals with “The works of Labov”, referring to Matha’s Vineyard case study and the social stratification of /r/ in NY city to highlight the role Labov played in shaping modern research in sociolinguistics.

### 3. Objectives

The objectives set for this course are of three types: *savoirs*, *savoir faire*, and *savoir être*. By the end of the fifth semester, you will acquire the fundamental concepts that relate to humans' knowledge of language, in general, and to the branch of sociolinguistics, in particular. You will apply and demonstrate this knowledge in your speech through varying your speech in different situations depending on the surrounding environment; such as choosing to be formal or informal with your interlocutors, or using your register as a student with your teachers and classmates during the course. As for the *savoir être*, you will develop a sense of interest towards linguistic variation that is socially-bound, as well as awareness and respect to people's linguistic choices. Succinctly, you will be able to:

- Explain and illustrate the relationship between language variation and social categorization
- Explain the scientific study of language and discuss research on sociolinguistics
- Differentiate between sociolinguistics and the sociology of language.
- Apply criteria to differentiate between a language and a dialect
- Identify regional, social and ethnic dialects.
- Recognize the features and contexts of use of style, register, slang and taboos
- Describe the phenomena of bilingualism, and multilingualism.
- Differentiate between *diaglossia*, and *code-switching*.

### 4. Resources Used

The main resource provided to you for use are the books of:

- Holmes, J. 2013. *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Meyerhoff, M. 2006. *Introducing Sociolinguistics*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Trudgill, P. 2000. *Sociolinguistics: An Introduction to Language and Society*. Penguin Books.
- Wardhaugh, R. 2006. *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Wardhaugh, R. & Fuller, J.M. 2015. *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. Wiley Blackwell.
- Yule, G. 2017. *The Study of Language*. CUP.

## **I. Introduction to Sociolinguistics**

### **1. Brief Historical Overview**

Sociolinguistics has not been taken as a separate and independent field of research until the 60's where interest was given to the examination of the relationship between linguistic structure and social structure. Before the 1960's, linguistics approach of studying language was a-social; linguists' task was to describe the universal grammatical rules that underlie any language structure and that are inherent in any speaker/listener competence (following the dominant Transformational Generative Grammar approach of Noam Chomsky). However, a growing interest in studying some eroding American Indian languages that dealt with the roles of cognition and culture in language use influenced sociolinguistics research. Language, for sociolinguists, is no more an abstract homogeneous entity that exists in isolation. Rather, it is a social phenomenon that influences and is influenced by society. Therefore, any linguistic inquiry should take into account the social context of language use and focus on its users and their performances (Hymes, 1967; and Labov, 1972).

### **2. The Relationship between Language and Society**

Language is inextricably related to society on various levels and ways. To understand the function of language in society and the impact society has on language, it is necessary to understand the scientific specialty of sociolinguistics and the objects of study by first reviewing key terms. Language is considered as an evolutionary phenomenon which is continually adapted to the communicative needs of its speakers. It consists largely of rules which determine its use. It is a system of vocal signs with an internal structure and used for the purposes of human communication. It is, then, a social phenomenon that carries a function of transmitting social messages between individuals. Whereas society refers to a group of people who are unified for certain purposes.

Language as a system of linguistic communication particular to a group intertwines with society or a group of people who are drawn together for a certain purpose or purposes. A society must have a language or languages in which to carry out its purposes. This connection is inevitable and complex and has different possible forms (such as the bi-directional influence, and no relationship between language and society). Another possible relationship between language and society states that social structure may either influence or determine linguistic structure and/or

behavior. Certain evidence may be adduced to support this view: the age-grading phenomenon whereby young children speak differently from older children and, in turn, children speak differently from mature adults. The social organization of age groups influences the language used in these groups. Varieties of language generally reflect such matters as speakers' regional, social or ethnic origins.

A second relationship is directly opposed to the first: linguistic structure and/or behavior may either influence or determine social structure. This is the view adopted in the Whorfian hypothesis, Bernstein's theory of Restricted and Elaborated Codes, and the Sexist Language theory. In their studies on Hopi language, Sapir and his student Whorf argued that there is a relationship between language and culture and you cannot understand one without knowledge of the other. Hopi and European languages have different ways of talking about the world and this influenced the way they saw it. The Hopi language treats the world as full of things (non-discrete) whereas Europeans as discrete and countable. To exemplify, the concept of time is revealed in European languages where they have: seconds, minutes, hours ..... Moreover, trees and plates are considered as countable elements whereas hope and water are not and this is revealed in the language used with each category. For Hopi speakers, time is indistinguishable and non-discrete. Whorf went further saying that the relationship between them is deterministic in the sense that the social categories we create and how we perceive events and actions are constrained by the language we speak. Language structure influences how its speakers view the world. Linguistic influence on one's worldview can be exemplified when one language makes distinctions that another does make. Then those who use the first language will more readily perceive the relevant differences in their environment: if you must classify camels, boats in certain ways, you will perceive them differently from someone who is not required to make such differences. This so called Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis has two version: a strong version and weak version. The strong version says that language determines thought and that linguistic categories limit and determine cognitive categories. However, the weak version says that linguistic categories and usage only influence thought and decisions. Examples:

- Inuit (member of an indigenous people of Northern Canada and parts of Greenland and Alaska) can think more intelligently about snow because their language contains more sophisticated and subtle words distinguishing various forms of it.

- The number and type of the basic colour words of a language determines how a subject sees the rainbow: as in Tarahumara, a Mexican indigenous language, there is one word 'syi' for the colours blue and green.

Basil Bernstein's theory (1971) of Elaborated and Restricted Code is another theory that shows the influence of language on society. Bernstein compared between English as used by Middle class children and by working class children in school. He noticed that middle class pupils tend to use an elaborated code through using more abstract words, less context dependent words and more complicated sentences. Working class children, on the other hand, use a more restricted code involving the use of less abstract and more context dependent words (draw on background knowledge and shared understanding, sense of includedness, and feeling of belonging). This reveals the close relationship between linguistic structure and social structure. Furthermore, the sexist language theory's main argument is that language affects the way we view men and women and that language creates sexism in society. For example: in English: the words 'chairman/fireman' imply that only men can do the job.

### **3. Sociolinguistics as a Branch of Study**

#### **3.1. Definition**

Sociolinguistics is a field that studies the relationship between language and society, between the uses of language and the social structures in which the users of language live. One of the principal uses of language is to communicate meaning, but it is also used to establish and maintain social relationships. To exemplify, most of the talk between a mother and her young child is devoted to nurturing the social bond between them. When you meet strangers, the way they talk informs you about their social and geographical backgrounds, and the way you talk send subtle signals about what you think of them. It is these aspects of language use that sociolinguists study.

In other words, the purpose of sociolinguists is to study the relationship between language and society in more specific ways which help in clearly defining and understanding both the social groups and the ways they speak. Holmes (1992, p. 16) says that 'the sociolinguist's aim is to move towards a theory which provides a motivated account of the way language is used in a community, and of the choices people make when they use language.' The core of sociolinguistics is a concern for the observable facts of language variation and principled thinking about the reasons and consequences of this variation and change. The fact that language changes is indisputable and



inevitable, and it is this fact of change, spread unevenly across time and space, that leads to linguistic variation. Sociolinguistic interest in variation and change can be drawn in a straight line back to the earlier traditional concerns of dialectology and philology, which described the different varieties that make up a language and traced the historical development of particular features of vocabulary and grammar. In fact, there is considerable internal variation and that speakers make constant use of the many different possibilities offered to them. No one speaks the same way all the time and people constantly exploit the nuances of the languages they speak for a wide variety of purposes. However, there are also definite bounds to that variation: no individual is free to do just exactly what he or she pleases so far as language is concerned. Sociolinguists, accordingly, are not only interested in documenting the different form of language, what it looks like, and how it is structured, but also want to answer questions like:

- Who uses those different forms or language varieties?
- Who do they use them with?
- Are they aware of their choice?
- Why do some forms or languages win out over others? (And is it always the same ones?)
- What kind of social information do we ascribe to different forms in a language or different language varieties?
- How much can we change or control the language we use?

### **3.2. 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’ (Fishman 1972, 46). It must be oriented toward both data and theory: that is, any conclusions we come to must be solidly based on evidence, but should also make theoretical contributions. Solid database is drawn from a wide variety of sources. These include censuses, documents, surveys, interviews, and recordings of interactions in both public and private spheres. Some data require the investigator to observe or record ‘naturally occurring’ linguistic events, for example, conversations, or gain access to written texts and interactions; others require the use of various elicitation techniques to gain access to the data we require or different varieties of experimental manipulation, for example, the matched-guise experiments. Some kinds of data require various statistical procedures, particularly when we wish to make statements about the typical behavior of a group, for example, a social class; other kinds seem best treated through such devices as graphing, scaling, and categorizing in non-

statistical ways, as in dialect geography; still others rely on interpretive analyses which draw on evidence from ethnographic research and/or transcripts of interactions.

Because of the varied methods and research questions in sociolinguistics, the concerns in research design are quite varied. In some cases, research can be based either on a quantitative analysis where it is necessary to pay attention to sampling techniques or on a qualitative analysis where the goal is to analyze language as cultural behavior and the generalizations are not about how particular groups of people speak, but how language is used to perform social functions.

### **3.3. Boundaries of Sociolinguistics**

Some investigators have found it appropriate to try to introduce a distinction between sociolinguistics (micro-sociolinguistics) and the sociology of language (macro-sociolinguistics). In this distinction, (micro-) sociolinguistics is concerned 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; the equivalent goal in the sociology of language is trying to discover how social structure can be better understood through the study of language, for example, how certain linguistic features serve to characterize particular social arrangements. Hudson (1996, p 4) has described the difference as follows: sociolinguistics is ‘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. Using the alternative terms given above, Coulmas (1997, p 2) says that ‘micro-sociolinguistics investigates how 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, on the other hand, studies what societies do with their languages, that is, 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.’

## **4. Identity, Power and Solidarity as Basic Concepts in Sociolinguistics**

In order to talk about how speakers use language, we must talk about both individuals and groups, together with the relationships between people within and across groups. One of the

current ways of thinking about this focuses on speaker identities. The term identity has been used in a variety of ways in both the social sciences and lay speech. In the current social theory, identities are not fixed attributes of people or groups but are dynamically constructed aspects which emerge through discourse and social behavior. Although we do look at identities of individuals, what we are primarily concerned with is social identity: ‘Identity is defined as the linguistic construction of membership in one or more social groups or categories’ (Kroskrity 2000, 111). To exemplify, a speaker may introduce a comment by saying As a mother . . . , thus explicitly referencing this aspect of her identity, what will emerge is a more nuanced picture of what type of mother she is – for example, protective, feminist, one who encourages independence, one who is concerned with the upward mobility of her children. Named social categories are not our identities but concepts we use to construct our identities.

Further, our identities are fluid and we do not have a single identity but multiple levels of identity, and shifting and sometimes even conflicting identities which emerge in different contexts. To continue the example above, the speaker may reference her identity as a mother but then also focus on how she identifies strongly with her profession and struggles to balance this with the demands of parenthood; this may be intertwined with her gender identity and her social class identity. In another conversation, this same speaker might focus on her political affiliations to construct a different aspect of her identity. Likewise, group identity categories are constantly being negotiated. What it means to be the member of a particular social category (e.g., ‘gay,’ ‘educated,’ ‘Latino’) may vary over time, space, and situation, and how particular speakers identify with or are assigned to these categories may also vary.

Power has a significant role to play; it undoubtedly has a key role to play in how we choose to identify ourselves and how we form groups with others. Power is ‘the ability to control events in order to achieve one’s aims’ (Tollefson 2006, 46) and is also ‘the control someone has over the outcomes of others’ (Myers-Scotton 2006, 199). It is pervasive in society and never completely absent, although it is exercised on a continuum from extremely brutal to most subtle. It may be exercised and resisted through words as well as deeds.

Solidarity concerns the social distance between people-how much experience they have shared, how many social characteristics they share (religion, sex, age, region of origin, occupation, interests), how far they are prepared to share intimacies, and other factors. For example, the way

you address you interlocutor in English (using titles or first names directly) indicates the social relations between the speakers. In fact, there are two prototypical situations of how to address others: - using first names: where there is high solidarity between the interlocutors (close subordinate), or using titles and last names indicating a low solidarity between the speakers (distant superior).

## II. Language Variations and Dialects

### Introduction

No human language is fixed, uniform, or unvarying. All languages show internal variation. Actual usage varies from group to group, and from speaker to speaker in terms of pronunciation, the choice of words, and the meaning of those words, and even the use of syntactic structures.

#### 1. Key Terms

**Variety:** is a way of speaking, and a specific set of linguistic items or speech patterns (sounds, words, grammar...) that we can associate or relate to some external factors or features (social class, area, age ... etc), Examples:

- Cockney as a variety of English spoken by east working-class Londoners.
- In the dialect atlas of England, the word 'child' is used in southern England and in midland, 'bairn' is used in northern England. The terms 'child' and 'bairn' are two different linguistic items.
- The grammatical expression "Give it to me" was used in traditional dialects of England saying "give me it!" or "give it me". These three expressions are instances of different grammatical constructions, each of which is a linguistic item.

**Vernacular:** is a variety of language or language that a person grows up with and is used in daily communication, in ordinary and common place. It is considered of lower status than standard language (social disapproval, pejorative association in public discourse). Petyt (1980, p. 25) defines it 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.

#### 2. Language vs. Dialect

The distinction between language and dialect is quite difficult and the terms are ambiguous. The confusion goes back to the Ancient Greeks. The Greek language was a group of distinct local varieties (Ionic, Doric, and Attic) descended from a common spoken language with each variety having its own literary uses (Ionic: History; Doric: Choral and Lyric works; and Attic: Tragedy). In English, dialect is used both for local varieties of English and for various types of informal,

lower class, and rural speech. It is often equivalent to nonstandard or even substandard variety. It holds a connotation of inferiority carried over to those who speak it (Standard language ideology). 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 and refers to the standard variety. 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. In fact, there are many criteria to distinguish between language and dialect, namely: Power and solidarity, standardization, and mutual intelligibility.

The various relationship among languages and dialects can be used to show how the concepts of ‘power’ and ‘solidarity’ help to understand what is happening. On the one hand, the term power entails some kind of asymmetrical relationship between entities; one has more of something that is important such as status or influence than the other. A language, then, has more power than any of its dialects. It is the powerful dialect because of non-linguistic factors (eg: Standard English/Parisian French). Solidarity, on the other hand, refers to a feeling of equality that people have with one another. This feeling can lead people to preserve a local dialect or an endangered language to resist power or to insist on independence (eg: the modernization of Hebrew/ the separation of Serbo-Croatian into Serbian and Croatian in Yugoslavia). A language 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/variety.

Standardization, according to Bell (1976), 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, and dictionaries, and possibly a literature. 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. In Fairclough’s words (2001, p. 47,) it becomes “part of a much wider process of economic, political and cultural unification . . . of great . . . importance in the establishment of nationhood, and the nation-state is the favoured form of capitalism.” 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 (AAVE) 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. He called them as the

‘formal’ matters of codification and elaboration, the former referring to the development of such things as grammars and dictionaries and the latter referring to the use of the standard in such areas as literature, the courts, education, administration, and commerce. Trudgill (1995, p. 5-6) defines Standard English as follows (note his use of ‘usually’ and ‘normally’ in this definition):

Standard English is that variety of English which is usually used in print, and which is normally taught in schools and to non-native speakers learning the language. It is also the variety which is normally spoken by educated people and used in news broadcasts and other similar situations. The difference between standard and nonstandard, it should be noted, 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, and Standard English speakers swear as much as others.

Given the existence of dialectal and idiolectal (typical to individuals) variation, what allows us to refer to something called English, as if it were a single, monolithic language? A standard answer to this question rests on the notion of mutual intelligibility. That is, even though native speakers of English vary in their use of the language, their various languages are similar enough in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar to permit them to understand each other. A New Yorker, a Texan, and a Californian may recognize differences in each other’s language, but they can understand each other (despite all the jokes to the contrary) and they recognize each other as speaking the “same language.” Hence, speaking the “same language” does not depend on two speakers speaking identical languages, but only very similar languages.

In discussing the notion of mutual intelligibility, it is interesting to note, by way of contrast, cases that might be called one-way intelligibility, involving speakers of different, but historically related, languages. For example, speakers of Brazilian Portuguese who do not know Spanish can often understand the forms of Spanish spoken in neighboring countries. The analogous Spanish speakers, however, find Portuguese largely unintelligible. A similar situation holds between Danish and Swedish: speakers of Danish can (more or less) comprehend Swedish, but the reverse situation is much less common. Even if one group of speakers can understand another group, they cannot be said to speak the same language unless the second group also understands the first, and thus the notion of mutual intelligibility is crucial in specifying when two languages are the “same” language.

Although the notion of mutual intelligibility seems like a reasonable criterion in defining dialects, the situation can be considerably complicated by social and political factors. In China, for

example, a northern Chinese speaker of the Beijing dialect (also known as Mandarin) cannot understand the speech of a southern Chinese speaker of Cantonese, and vice versa. For this reason, a linguist might well label Mandarin and Cantonese as two distinct “languages.” Nevertheless, in traditional studies of the Chinese language, both Mandarin and Cantonese are regarded as “dialects” of Chinese, given that they are historically related (i.e., they may have been offshoots of several closely related dialects that existed earlier in the history of the Chinese language). Moreover, both Mandarin and Cantonese are spoken in the same nation (they are not languages of two different countries with different governments), and speakers of both “dialects” can use the written language (in the form of Chinese characters) as a common language of communication. For such reasons, the tendency has persisted to use the term dialect to refer to various mutually unintelligible forms of the Chinese language

Historical and political factors can also give rise to the opposite situation, where two mutually intelligible varieties are considered not dialects of the same language but two distinct languages. An example of this situation is provided by “Dutch” and “Flemish” forms. Speakers of “Dutch” understand speakers of “Flemish” and vice versa. However, there is an important political distinction between the two: “Dutch” is spoken in the Netherlands and “Flemish” is spoken in Belgium. They are, therefore, considered as separate languages. A final example is Serbo-Croatian. Serbian and Croatian are mutually intelligible dialects, but for historical reasons they use different writing systems. Croatian is written in a Roman-based alphabet, whereas Serbian is written in a Cyrillic-based alphabet. Thus, the criterion of mutual intelligibility is quite relative.

When groups of speakers differ noticeably in their language, they are often said to speak different dialects of the language. Dialects refer to distinct forms of a language and carry no value judgement as incorrect or corrupt. For sociolinguists, this entails that the so-called ‘standard English’ is a dialect of English and is no more ‘correct’ than any other form of English (the monarchs of England and teenagers in New York and Los Angeles all speak dialects of English). Dialects indicate that speakers show some variation in the way they use elements of the language.

### **3. Language and Dialect Continuum/ Isoglosses**

A dialect is simply a distinct form of a language, possibly associated with a recognizable regional, social, or ethnic group, differentiated from other forms of the language by specific linguistic features (e.g., pronunciation, or vocabulary, or grammar, or any combination of these).



From a linguistic point of view, dialect is a theoretical concept. In reality, variation in language is so pervasive that each language is actually a continuum of languages from speaker to speaker, and from group to group, and no absolute lines can be drawn between different forms of a language. Language/dialect continuum is said to exist when two or more languages or dialects merge one into the other without a definable boundary. Dialects are slightly different between areas that are geographically close to each other and gradually decreasing in mutual intelligibility as the distances become greater. When a language is recognized as being spoken in different varieties, the issue becomes one of deciding how many varieties and how to classify each variety i.e. to work on dialect geography. The latter is a term used to describe attempts made to map the distributions of various linguistic features so as to show their geographical provenance. Those maps are sometimes drawn to show actual boundaries around different linguistic feature. These boundaries are called isoglosses, so as to distinguish an area in which a certain feature is found from areas in which it is absent.

#### **4. Types of Dialects**

There are three main types of dialects: regional, social, and ethnic dialects. Regional dialect (also called geographical dialect) refers to the distinct form of a language spoken in a certain geographical area. That is, people of certain areas use distinct linguistic features that differentiate them from other speakers of other forms of the language. Regional dialects include local ones (e.g., the Yankee English of Cape Cod or of Boston, the Russian of Moscow or of Smolensk) or broader regional ones (such as Delaware Valley English, Australian English, or Tuscan Italian). When referring to regional variation, a distinction between accent and dialect should be made. An accent refers to how people pronounce what they say (Standard English is spoken in a variety of accents in North America, India, New York and Singapore). The concept of “Isogloss” is related to regional dialects. Social dialect originates among social groups and is related to some factors mainly social class (social strata) and educational levels. It is the distinct form of a language spoken by members of a specific socioeconomic class such as: the working class dialects in England, British public school dialect, AAVE spoken in New York, Detroit, and Buffalo, and Caste in India. Ethnic dialect such as the form of English sometimes referred to as Yiddish English (Historically associated with speakers of Eastern European Jewish Ancestry). Dialects are never purely regional,

or purely social or purely ethnic. These are just factors that combine and intersect in various ways in the identification of dialects.

## **5. Other Language Varieties**

### **5.1. Style and Register**

When choosing a style, you can speak very formally or very informally, your choice being governed by circumstances. Ceremonial occasions almost invariably require very formal speech, public lectures somewhat less formal, casual conversation quite informal, and conversations between intimates on matters of little importance may be extremely informal and casual. We may try to relate the level of formality chosen to a variety of factors: the kind of occasion; the various social, age, and other differences that exist between the participants; the particular task that is involved, for example, writing or speaking; the emotional involvement of one or more of the participants; and so on. We appreciate that such distinctions exist when we recognize the stylistic appropriateness of ‘What do you intend to do, your majesty?’ and the inappropriateness of ‘Waddy intend doin’, Rex?’ in different situations. 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.

Register is another complicating factor in any study of language varieties. Generally speaking, registers are sets of language items associated with discrete occupational or social groups. Agha (2006, 24) describes a register as “a linguistic repertoire that is associated, culture-internally, with particular social practices and with persons who engage in such practices”. Biber and Conrad (2003, 175) distinguish work on registers from other analyses of discourse, saying that they focus on the situational parameters defining the communicative situation. Speakers learn different registers through socialization in different cultural groups within their society. What we refer to as ‘legalese’ or ‘personal ads’ are identifiable registers for most people. Use of such registers thus either conforms to the norms for a particular, socially situated way of using language, or is a way of invoking the context usually associated with that register. Of course, one person may control a variety of registers: you can be a stockbroker and an archeologist, or a mountain climber and an economist. A register helps you to construct an identity at a specific time or place.

## **5.2.Slang and Taboo Language**

It has been said that slang is something that everyone can recognize but no one can define. Speakers show enormous creativity in their use of slang (it is, indeed, one of the most creative areas of language use), and it is often the source of a good deal of humor. Although a precise definition of slang seems extremely difficult (if not impossible), there are, nevertheless, some salient features of this form of language.

Slang is part of casual, informal styles of language use. Further, the term slang has traditionally carried a negative connotation: it is often perceived as a “low” or “vulgar” form of language and is deemed to be out of place in formal styles of language. Moreover, slang, like fashions in clothing and popular music, changes quite rapidly. Slang terms can enter a language rapidly, then fall out of fashion in a matter of a few years or even months. This rate of turnover is much greater than for other areas of the vocabulary of a language. Specific areas of slang are often associated with a particular social group, and hence one can speak of teenage slang, underworld (criminal) slang, the slang of the drug culture, and so on. In this respect slang is a kind of jargon, and its use serves as a mark of membership and solidarity within a given social group.

Slang is sometimes referred to as vernacular (especially when it is associated with a particular social group), and some forms of slang fall under the term colloquialism, referring to informal conversational styles of language. Slang vocabulary often consists of regular vocabulary used in specific ways. For example, the words “turkey” and “banana” are regular vocabulary items in English (and can be used in formal styles with their literal meaning), but in slang they can be used as insults (referring to stupid or foolish people). In addition to the use of regular vocabulary words, however, slang (like jargon) also makes use of regular word formation devices (of the sort discussed in chapter 2) to create new words. For example, slang words can be coined, as was the case for forms such as *diddleysquat* (He doesn’t know *diddleysquat*, meaning “He doesn’t know anything”).

Taboo words are those that are to be avoided entirely, or at least avoided in “mixed company” or “polite company.” Typical examples involve common swear words such as *Damn!* or *Shit!* The latter is heard more and more in “polite company,” and both men and women use both words openly. Many, however, feel that the latter word is absolutely inappropriate in “polite” or formal contexts. In place of these words, certain euphemisms—that is, polite substitutes for taboo

words—can be used, including words such as darn (a euphemism for damn), heck (a euphemism for hell ), gee or jeez (a euphemism for the exclamation Jesus!), and so on. An amusing example is the F-bomb, a euphemism for that notorious English word that many newspapers spell as f ---.

Taboo language is not limited to obscenity—sacred language can also be taboo, that is, language to be avoided outside the context of sacred ritual. In many societies the language of religious or magical rites can only be used by certain members of the society (priests or shamans). What counts as taboo language is something defined by culture, and not by anything inherent in the language itself. There is nothing inherent in the sounds of the expression Shit! that makes it “obscene”—it is simply that in our cultural history the word has come to be known and used as a “swear word.” Foreigners learning English as a second language will at first find nothing unusual about the word, and will not experience the “emotional charge” that often accompanies the use of a taboo word. For Americans learning French, there is nothing intrinsic in the expression Merde! (meaning “Shit!”) that seems obscene.

### **III. Languages in Contact**

#### **1. Bilingualism and Multilingualism**

Monolingualism, that is, 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. 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 favorably.

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, p. 50) says, ‘multilingualism involving balanced, native-like 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. To

illustrate, in Papua New Guinea there are many languages and an increasingly used lingua franca, Tok Pisin. Many people are plurilingual. The Yimas of Papua New Guinea use their own language in traditional pursuits and Tok Pisin for topics from the encroaching outside world. Domestic matters and local food provision, largely the province of females, call for Yimas just as do mortuary feasts, the province of males. But matters to do with government, trade, and travel require Tok Pisin. Language choice among the Yimas is dependent on occasion: Yimas to perform traditional practices and Tok Pisin to establish identity within a wider community.

## **2. Diglossia**

### **2.1. Definition**

Diglossia is the term used to describe a situation in which there are two distinct codes with clear functional separation; that is, one code is employed in one set of circumstances and the other in an entirely different set. Ferguson (1959, 336) has defined diglossia as follows:

Diglossia is 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 the same article he identifies four language situations which show the major characteristics of the diglossic phenomenon; 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.

The first situation is in Arabic-speaking countries, in which the two varieties are Classical Arabic (H) and the various regional colloquial varieties (L). The second example is Standard German (H) and Swiss German (L) in Switzerland. Third, Ferguson cites the language situation in Haiti, where the varieties are Standard French (H) and Haitian Creole (L). The fourth is found in Greece with Katharévousa (H) and Dhimotiki or Demotic (L) varieties of Greek. In each case the

two varieties coexisted for a long period, sometimes, as with Arabic and Greek, for many centuries. Consequently, the phenomenon of diglossia is not ephemeral in nature; in fact, the opposite is true: it appears to be a persistent social and linguistic phenomenon.

Diglossia has been widely attested across space (e.g., varieties of Tamil in the south of India) and time (e.g., Latin in Europe in the Middle Ages). According to Ferguson (1959, 338), it is likely to come into being when (1) “there is a sizable body of literature in a language closely related to (or even identical with) the natural language of the community . . . [and when (2)] literacy in the community is limited to a small elite, [and] . . . a suitable period of time, of the order of several centuries, passes from the establishment of (1) and (2).”

## **2.2. Domains**

A key defining characteristic of diglossia is that the two varieties are kept quite separate in their functions. One is used in one set of circumstances and the other in an entirely different set; these circumstances are called domains. For example, the H varieties may be used for delivering sermons and formal lectures, especially in a parliament or legislative body, for giving political speeches, for broadcasting the news on radio and television, and for writing poetry, in literature, and editorials in newspapers. In contrast, the L varieties may be used in giving instructions to workers in low-prestige occupations or to household servants, in conversation with familiars, in ‘soap operas’ and popular programs on the radio, in captions on political cartoons in newspapers, and in ‘folk literature.’ On occasion, a person may lecture in an H variety but answer questions about its contents or explain parts of it in an L variety so as to ensure understanding.

Speakers are unlikely to use an H variety in circumstances calling for an L variety, for example, for addressing a servant; nor do they usually use an L variety when an H is called for, for example, for writing a ‘serious’ work of literature. If you do the latter, it may be a risky endeavor; 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 the readers, 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.

The L variety often shows a tendency to borrow learned words from the H variety, particularly when speakers try to use the L variety in more formal ways. The result is a certain admixture of H vocabulary into the L. On other occasions, however, there may be distinctly different pairs of words, that is, doublets, in the H and L varieties to refer to very common objects and concepts. Since the domains of use of the two varieties do not intersect, there will be an L word for use in L situations and an H word for use in H situations with no possibility of transferring the one to the other. So far as the pronunciation of the two varieties is concerned, the L system will often appear to be the more 'basic.' However, actual circumstances can vary. Whereas the two varieties of Greek have very similar sound systems, there is a considerable difference between Classical Arabic and the colloquial varieties, and a still greater difference between High German and Swiss German.

### **2.3. Language Attitudes and Ideologies**

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. Associated with this prestige valuation for the H variety, there is likely to be a strong feeling that the prestige is deserved because the H variety is more 'beautiful,' 'logical,' and 'expressive' than the L variety. That is why it is deemed appropriate for literary use, for religious purposes, and so on. There may also be considerable and widespread resistance to translating certain books into the L variety, for example, the Qur'an into one or other colloquial varieties of Arabic or the Bible into Haitian Creole or Demotic Greek.

### **2.4. Language Learning**

Another important difference between the H and L varieties is that all children learn the L variety; it is also generally the home language. Some may concurrently learn the H variety, but many do not learn the H variety at all; for example, most Haitians have no knowledge at all of Standard French but all can speak some variety of Haitian Creole, although some, as we have said, may deny that they have this ability. The H variety is also likely to be learned in some kind of formal setting, for example, in classrooms or as part of a religious or cultural indoctrination. To that extent, the H variety is 'taught,' whereas the L variety is 'learned.' Teaching requires the



availability of grammars, dictionaries, standardized texts, and some widely accepted view about the nature of what is being taught and how it is most effectively to be taught.

There are usually no comparable grammars, dictionaries, or standardized texts for the L variety, and any view of that variety is likely to be highly pejorative in nature. When such grammars and other aids do exist, they have in many cases been written by outsiders, for example, ‘foreign’ linguists. They are also likely to be neither well known to the people whose linguistic usage they describe nor well received by those people, since such works are unlikely to support some of the myths that accompany diglossia, particularly the myth that the L variety lacks any kind of ‘grammar.’

### **3. Code-Switching**

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. The term code switching (also called code mixing) refers to a situation in which a speaker uses a mixture of distinct language varieties as discourse proceeds. 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, p. 247) says, “codes witching is a conversational strategy used to establish, cross or destroy group boundaries; to create, evoke or change interpersonal relations with their rights and obligations.” This entails that code switching occurs quite commonly in everyday speech with regard to levels of style, as, for example, when speakers mix formal and informal styles. The speaker can mix styles for a certain rhetorical effect: the juxtaposition of formal speech-making style with informal colloquial style adds emphasis to the speaker’s position on a given issue; and the use of the informal style in this context is intended by the speaker to increase a feeling of solidarity with the audience.

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 are native speakers of Hokkien, another variety of Chinese. 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. 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.

Code switching can often happen within a single sentence; intra-sentential switching (and at numerous points within a sentence). Among the most interesting cases of this sort of code switching are those in which a speaker mixes distinct (mutually unintelligible) languages, a situation that often arises in bilingual or multilingual areas such as the American Southwest. Code switching can also occur between sentences, inter-sentential switching.

There is another distinction of the types of code switching, namely; situational and metaphorical code switching. Situational code-switching 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. 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. As the term itself suggests, metaphorical code-switching has an affective dimension to it: the choice of code carries symbolic meaning, that is, the language it’s the message. This is illustrated in a quote attributed to Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, which indicates attitudes about certain languages being holy, the language of love or male solidarity, or crude or bestial: ‘I speak Spanish to God, Italian to women, French to men, and

German to my horse.’ Gumperz (1982a) cites examples of metaphorical code switching from three sets of languages (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 in group 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.

Code-switching is not a uniform phenomenon; i.e., the norms vary from group to group, even within what might be regarded as a single community. Gumperz says that “each communicating subgroup tends to establish its own conventions with respect to both borrowing and code-switching,” and that factors such as region of origin, local residence, social class, and occupational niche are involved in defining the norms. Moreover, bilinguals in such communities are aware not only of the norms that apply within their own sub-groups but also of some of the norms that other bilinguals observe.

## VI. The Works of William Labov

### 1. Characteristics of Labov Approach

Labov is an American sociolinguist who started by investigating language use in Martha's Vineyard and New York city. His seminal investigations were based on principles and methods which have become standard in sociolinguistics and which led to insights which are generally accepted today.

**Data:** he works on sociolect (the dialect of a particular social class) and criticizes idiolects (because they do not show the amount of consistency as sociolects do).

**Method:** empirical method

**Paradigm:** inductive reasoning

- The basic assumption of sociolinguistics is that the variation observed in language use is non-random; it is socially significant. The task of the sociolinguist has been to quantify this variation and to give a principled account of its occurrence.
- Labov incorporated a new way of gathering linguistic data by rapid anonymous and spontaneous interviews, in addition to other methods for analyzing linguistic data.
- Objectivity of linguistics analysis and interpretation was raised.
- Labov did not separate language from its social context. His aim is "to avoid the inevitable obscurity of texts, the self-consciousness of formal elicitations, and the self-deception of introspection" (Labov, 1972, p xiii) (systematic observation).
- Labov added several language tasks to be done by the interviewee during the interview. This sociolinguistic interview consists of four structured parts in which the interviewee is asked to:
  - 1- Read a list of minimal pairs (pairs of words with different meanings but only differ from each other in one sound)
  - 2- Read a list of words in isolation (that contain and that do not contain the linguistic variables)
  - 3- Read aloud a short narrative (carefully constructed to contain the variable)
  - 4- Talk with the interviewer about their life, beliefs, and life experiences (informal style with less attention to speech)

## **2. Martha's Vineyard Case Study**

Martha's Vineyard is an island off the south of Cape Cod in New England. It is located in the state of Massachusetts. It is a touristic island, isolated and accessible only by boat or by air. Its population can be divided into three groups: English Yankee settlers, aboriginal Indians, and Portuguese settlers. It is a contrasting island because on the one side, there is a congested area at the down-island where the population of the main town lives of tourism during summer, while on the other side, there are mostly farmers and fishermen at the up-island.

Labov studies the change in the pronunciation of /ay/ and /aw/ with regard to many regions, age levels, occupational and ethnic groups. He developed the idea of anonymous interviews by asking people questions like: "when we speak of the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, what does right mean?"

Labov obtained the following results:

- Centralization of /ay/ turns out to be realized as /oi/ and /ow/ while /aw/ is realized as /ei/ and /ew/.
- Centralization often happened by people aged between 30-60 years old.
- Fisherman living in the up-island regions centralized the two diphthongs (age and occupation).
- The English Yankees and Indian inhabitants were more likely to use centralization than the Portuguese (ethnic group).

Centralization, accordingly, indicates the speakers' attitude toward their island (positive and negative attitude) since people who like MV tend to centralize the diphthongs; those who do not like to stay, don't centralize them. This entails that speech is always linked to social attitudes and linguistic change of several groups of society.

## **3. The Social Stratification of /r/in New York City**

The so-called r-less dialect of New York City is so well known that it is often the subject of humor, especially on the part of the New Yorkers who themselves speak it. It is commonly thought that speakers of the dialect completely lack /r/ in words such as car, card, four, fourth, and so on,

but this is a misconception, as an intriguing study by the sociolinguist William Labov (1972) reveals.

Labov began with the hypothesis that New York City speakers vary in their pronunciation of /r/ according to their social status. Labov interviewed salespeople at several New York City department stores that differed in price range and social prestige. Assuming that salespeople tend to “borrow prestige” from their customers, Labov predicted that the social stratification of customers at different department stores would be mirrored in a similar stratification of salespeople. These assumptions led him to hypothesize that “salespeople in the highest-ranked store will have the highest values of (r) [ɹ/]; those in the middle-ranked store will have intermediate values of (r) [ɹ/]; and those in the lowest-ranked store will show the lowest value” (1972, 45).

Labov chose three stores: Saks Fifth Avenue (high prestige), Macy’s (middle level), and S. Klein (low prestige). He interviewed salespeople by asking them a question that would elicit the answer fourth floor. The interviewer approached the informant in the role of a customer asking for directions to a particular department. The department was one which was located on the fourth floor. When the interviewer asked, “Excuse me, where are the women’s shoes?” the answer would normally be, “Fourth floor.” The interviewer then leaned forward and said, “Excuse me?” He would usually then obtain another utterance, “Fourth floor,” spoken in careful style under emphatic stress. The phrase “fourth floor” has two instances of /ɹ/, both of which are subject to variation in the pronunciation of New York City speakers, and Labov was able to study both casual and careful pronunciations of this phrase.

The result turned out to correlate in an interesting way with the hypothesis. For example, Labov found that at Saks 30 percent of the salespeople interviewed always pronounced both /r/’s in the test phrase; at Macy’s 20 percent did so; and at S. Klein only 4 percent did. In addition, Labov found that 32 percent of the interviewed salespeople at Saks had Variable pronunciation of /r/ (sometimes /r/ was pronounced and sometimes not, depending on context); at Macy’s 31 percent of the interviewees had variable pronunciation; and at S. Klein only 17 percent did. These overall results do suggest that pronunciation of /ɹ/ in New York City is correlated, at least loosely, with social stratification of the speakers. What about the differences in pronunciation between the casual and the emphatic styles? It turns out that in the casual response the /r/ of floor was

pronounced by 63 percent of the salespeople at Saks, 44 percent at Macy's, and only 8 percent at S. Klein. In contrast, in the careful, emphatic response the /r/ of floor was pronounced by 64 percent at Saks, 61 percent at Macy's (note the jump from 44 percent), and 18 percent at S. Klein. In other words, at Saks there was very little difference between casual and careful pronunciations, whereas at Macy's and S. Klein the difference between these styles was significantly larger.

Labov found that the use of /r/ corresponded to higher class of store and increases in careful speech. This means that the higher the socio-economic status of the store, the more /r/ sounds were produced. The lower the status, the fewer /r/ sounds were produced by those who worked there. As Labov (1972, p. 51-2) explained: "This suggests that speakers at the middle and lower levels of the New York City social scale are perfectly aware that a final /r/ occurs in words such as floor. Even though they omit this /r/ in casual pronunciation, it reappears in careful speech. In emphatic pronunciation of the final (r) [r/], Macy's employees come very close to the mark set by Saks. It would seem that r-pronunciation is the norm at which a majority of Macy employees aim, yet not the one they use most often. In Saks, we see a shift between casual and emphatic pronunciation, but it is much less marked."

Labov's study illustrates once again that there is often no absolute or simple distinction between one dialect and another: we cannot simply say that the New York City dialect is r-less. Rather, the pronunciation of /r/ sounds in that dialect is variable, and this variation seems to be correlated both with social factors and with context (casual or careful). Thus, just as no language can be said to be unvarying or fixed, so no dialect of a language can be said to be unvarying or fixed either. Finally, not even the language of an individual speaker is unvarying: an individual New Yorker may well show variation in pronouncing r-sounds. Moreover, the use of a particular speech sound functions as a social marker (a linguistic feature that marks the speaker as a member of a particular social group).