Language and society

- Language has a social function. It helps us to establish and maintain relationships.

- Meaning, while language is principally used for communication purposes, it is also used to establish and maintain social relationships.

- Also, the users of the same language speak differently from each other.

- The kind of language each of them chooses to use is in part determined by his social background.

- Thus, language, in turn, reveals information about its speaker.

- So, when we talk about the relationship between language and society, it is an exploration of a bidirectional relationship between the language and its users.

Speech Community

A *speech community* is a group of people who share a set of rules and norms for communication and interpretation of speech.

"Rules and norms" includes everything from intonation and vocabulary, to body positioning and eye contact

Ottenheimer pg. 94 – "A speech community is a group of people who share one or more varieties of language and the rules for using those varieties in everyday communication."

The idea of a speech community allows us to do two things:

1) Focus on a smaller social unit than all the speakers of a language.

2) Get away from the idea that one language = one culture

In other words, a **speech community** is defined as a group of people who form a community and share the same language or a particular variety of language.

The important characteristic of a speech community:

A. They speak the same language or dialect.

B. the members of the group must interact linguistically with other members of the community.

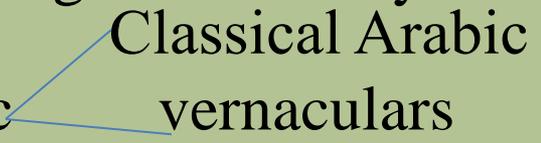C. They may share similar attitudes toward linguistic norms.

Speech variety, also known as language variety, refers to any distinguishable form of speech used by a speaker or group of speakers.

The distinctive characteristics of a speech variety are mainly reflected in its pronunciation, syntax and vocabulary.

Key sociolinguistic concepts

- Variety: a neutral term to refer to any form of language (languages & dialects)

- Speech community: controversial concept:

  a community of people who share a linguistic variety as their own and share social norms.

-       shared <u>linguistic norms</u> , shared <u>communicative competence</u> and shared <u>social norm</u>s. (can be a city, neighborhood, region, nation)

- Communicative (Sociolinguistic) competence:

  speaker's underlying knowledge of rules of grammar and rules for their use in socially appropriate circumstances. (learned through socialization), e.g. please, thank you. Greeting formally, informally.

- Social knowledge is essential for membership in speech community.

Multilingulaism

- Multilingualism: the use of more than two languages, e.g. Nigeria, India, and Philippines have hundreds of languages.
- Canada, USA.
- How multilingual nations develop? migration, imperialism, federation
- Diglossia: A situation in which two forms of the same language co-exist in a complementary relationship in a society. High variety, low variety. Both forms are grammatically distinct, don't overlap.   Classical Arabic
- Each variety has its domains, e.g Arabic   vernaculars (dialects)
- The term is extended to refer to any two languages, even related ones, that has this kind of social and functional distribution.
- Triglossia ,Tunisia
- Polyglossia: several H and L languages co-exist in a complex multilingual society, e.g. Singapore L,H, M varieties,e.g. Mandarin, Tamil and Malay are official languages.

Code switching\mixing

- The alternation between two varieties across sentences or clause boundaries.

- It implies some degree of competence in the two varieties even if bilingual fluency is not yet stable.

- What determines code switching?

- Domain-based or situational code switching.

   Domain (social and physical setting), addressee (interlocutor),

- Constraints : switching takes place between languages with similar structure? Spanish/Englishbetween determiners and nouns, Subjects and verbs, but not nouns and adjectives.

Style, context and register

- Style, in the most general sense, refers to the distinctive way of speaking or writing. People adopt different styles in different contexts.
- The influence of the addressee on the speaker's language: <u>solidarity</u> (social closeness) between participants is an important influence on speech style.
- Casual, relaxed, <u>vernacular forms</u> with friends
- Standard forms with strangers
- Many factors affect social distance\solidarity between people

Factors affecting speaker's style

- Age of addressee: child, elderly vs. adult: simpler vocabulary and less complex sentences, 'we' vs. 'you' example 4, p.225

- Social background of the addressee, example 6 p. 228

- Peter Trudgill interviewing people in Norwich, use of [t] in better, bet. Glottal stop used up to 98% with lower class interviewees (100%). With higher class (25%), Trudgill's use dropped to 30%. He was accommodating to his interviewees.

- Relative status and solidarity between speaker and addressee

- Colloquial style: vernacular

- social dialect survey in New York Labov elicited the vernacular: the style in which minimum attention is given to the monitoring of speech

- Observer's paradox can be overcome by manipulating the topic of interview

Contact-induced change: pidgins and creoles

- pidgins and creoles are languages that emerge out of the contact between speakers of more than two different languages.

- Social conditions associated with the contact

- Limited social contact: speakers may only be in contact in a reduced set of social interactions, such as trading or work. Limited access to native speaker's model of each other's languages.

- Lack of motivation to acquire native-speaker like skills in the other language.

- How they are learnt.

- Pidgin: a contact language that is not nobody's first language, no native speakers. Arise in the conditions of trade and labor related contexts.

- Restricted social functions

- A creole a contact language which has native speakers, may be added the community repertoire resulting in bilingualism.

- A creole serves most of the or all of the functions that any natural human language must serve; everyday interaction, telling stories, jokes, games, etc.

Functional definition of pidgins and creoles

- Any variety used for business or limited to work place may be considered a pidgin.

- Russenorsk used between Russian and Norwegian sailors in The Bering Sea during fishing season of the northern summer.

- Francais tiraillou 'torn French' used in the military parts of the French colonies in Africa.

- Once a variety is used a as vehicle for all types of communication, it has become a creole.

- Once it acquires its native speakers, it becomes a creole (nativization).

- Creolisation: the process by which a pidgin becomes the first language of group of speakers. Exansion of a pidgin into a wider range of social functions.

- Vernacularisation: the process by which a contact variety becomes used with the full range of social functions of the language of the home.

Characteristics of Pidgins

- Pidgins distinct from Input languages by:
  - Structural reduction, typically in morphology
  - Lack many semantic and grammatical distinctions
  - Few stylistic resources (=conventional variation]
  - Lexical reduction, derivation from dominant groups

- 1. Simplification of *superstrate* **(dominant language)** grammatical structure

  2. Retention of *substrate* (less dominant) grammatical structures

Language shift

- **Language (dialect) shift**: when a community who share a native language abandon it, and collectively shift to speaking another one instead.

- Language shift is always preceded by **multilingualism**

- What effects does language shift have on the structures of the languages involved?

- Language shift can happen raidly or slowly.

- **Caribbean Creole languages** developed within a century, even less, from African and European languages. Most **African languages** were lost in 1-2 generations under the catastrophic conditions of slavery

- Language shift is not a new phenomenon. It has been going on for all of recorded history. Whenever two cultures/populations with different languages come in intense contact, shift is a possibility.
- Typically those who shift are the weaker group, but
- sometimes it is the more powerful one who shifts.
- Vikings who speak Old Norse invaded in the British isles in 787 kept their language for centuries, then shifted to the evolving English language. Vikings went to Northern France became bilingual then shifted to French.
- Historical: Language shift to Arabic by Berber population in North Africa (Morocco) following the Muslim conquest
- Language shift to Arabic by Armenians in Jordan.

Language death (attrition)

- Language death is the complete disappearance of a language. (Latin is not a dead language)

- An old phenomenon as old as the recorded history of the languages of the world.

- Often death comes by in a situation of dialect contact and shifting bilingualism.

- Most commonly <u>a gradual process</u> spanning several generations.

- Sudden death: when the last speaker of a language spoken by a very small and isolated group dies, the death of Ishi the last wild Indian in North America.

- Radical language death: Sometimes a result of **genocide**, the sudden elimination of an entire population.

- Example of language death by genocide: Australian Aboriginal languages

- Over 350 languages were spoken when Capt. Cook landed in 1770. 200 years later, **only 90** survived as viable languages.

- Only 10% of Aboriginal people still speak native languages.

- Bottom-to-top death: sometimes death affects first the lower registers of the language leaving for last the most formal register (Latinate pattern).
- Speakers typical of language death situations:

1. Semi-speakers: imperfect speakers with partial command of the productive skills, but perfect command of receptive skills.

2. remembers: speakers who may have been at an early stage fluent speakers, but have lost most of their earlier linguistic ability. Typical of advanced stage of language death, found in conditions of isolation.

Language and social class

- Sociolect (or social dialect): a socially distinct variety.

- Speaker A   speaker B

  'I done it yesterday'   'I did it yesterday'

  'He ain't got it'   'He hasn't got it'

- Grammatical, phonetic, phonological differences give us clues about their social background.

- Social class accents

- Why do we have these differences?

- Physical barriers and distance

- Regional dialect boundaries coincide with geographical barriers, mountains, swamps, rivers, e.g. 'house' [hu:s] north of the river Humber vs. [haus] (diphthong) south of the river.

- Social barriers and distance

- The diffusion of a linguistic feature through a society may be halted by social factors including social class.

- A linguistic innovation that begins in upper class may reach the lower class last, if at all.

Social stratification

- Any hierarchical (ranking) ordering of groups within a society in terms of power, wealth and status.

- In the industrialized societies of the West, social stratification takes the form of stratification into social classes and gives rise linguistically to social-class dialects.

- Social class is a <u>controversial concept</u>, no general agreement as to the exact nature or definition or existence of social classes.

- **Social class stratification is not universal**, e.g. India caste system (hereditary). Rigid separation into distinct groups, therefore, social distance is more differentiating than the geographical distance in India.

- Unlike the situation in India, in the class societies of the English speaking world, the linguistic situation is more complex.

- **Social classes are not clearly defined**,

- aggregates of people with similar social and economic characteristics.

- **Social mobility is possible**, the movement up or down the social hierarchy.

- In the beginning linguistic complexity was ignored by focusing on idiolect, or speakers in rural areas (dialectologists, dialect surveys).

- It is only after the Second World War, linguistic realized that confining dialect studies to rural areas, they missed important information about the majority of people who live in towns.

- Urban dialectologist faced the problem of describing fully and accurately the speech of large towns and cities with heterogeneous populations.

- In 1966 the American linguist William Labov published The Social Stratification of English in New York city, a large scale survey, tape-recorded interviews with 340, by random sample

- Representative sample therefore accurate description of all the varieties in the area.

- Labov also developed techniques to elicit normal speech from people in spite of the recorder.

- Developed methods for quantitative measurements of linguistic data.

- Labov showed that variation is not free in the speech of New Yorkers, e.g 'guard', 'beard', and 'bad'.

- Variation is not random, but determined by extra-linguistic factors in a predictable way.

Social and regional dialect variation

Social variation

highest class: standard dialect

lowest class: most localized non standard

regional variation
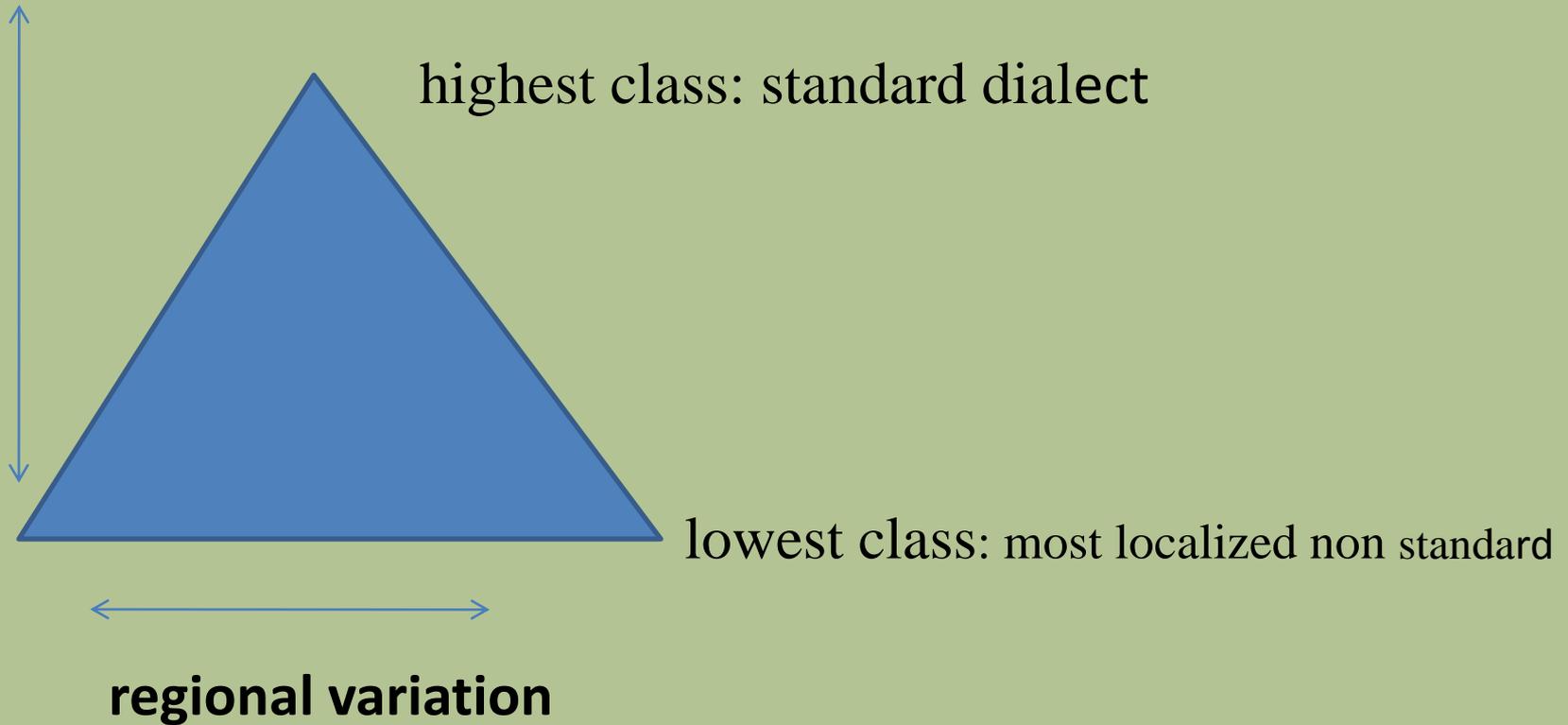
Language and ethnicity

- Ethnic-group differentiation in a mixed community is a particular type of social differentiation and has linguistic differentiation associated with it.

- Experiment carried out in the USA, tape recordings of two different sets of speakers.

- Two types:

- Language as a defining characteristic of the ethnic group membership, common world wide e.g. multilingual Africa, Canada. People will identify themselves as belonging to a particular ethnic group on the basis of their language.

- Separate identity of ethnic groups is signaled by distinct varieties of the same language e.g. Jewish, Italians in New York.

- Ethnic groups are fluid entities whose boundaries change through history.

- Example: Yugoslavia, in the centre of the country the language was Sebo-croat. Different ethnic groups who speak the same dialects. With the breakup of Yugoslavia, the government in Zagreb calls its national language Croation, Latin alphabet, the government in Belgrade calls its language Serbian, Cyrillic alphabet. Moslims of Bosnia calls their language Bosnian

- They stress their separate nationhoods and ethnicities by focusing on lexical differences.

- Ethnic groups in New York. Jewish, Italian.
- Ethnic groups tend to form separate communities within the city.
- Differences are due to the influence of substratum varieties, languages spoken before they become speakers of New York English. Yiddish or Italia accent accent of the first generation would lead to hypercorrection of foreign features by the second generation. The use of high vowels in 'bad', 'bag' by Italians because their fathers used more open vowel than the English sound.

Language and social networks

- Linguistic variation can be analyzed in terms of social networks: the grouping of people based on the frequency and quality of interaction.

- James and Lesley Milroy's 1985 study of Belfast.

- The relationships individuals contract with others--- through social and geographical space linking many individuals.

- Social networks are defined by who your friends are, who live near, who you work with.

- Network analyses ask how often the members of these groups are the same and how often they are completely different.
- The diffusion of Linguistic change happens fast and efficiently along horizontal channels (within one age and a social cohort). On the other hand vertical channels (across generation, social classes) are comparatively slow and inefficient with regard to the transmission of a linguistic innovation.

- How can you identify a social network?

- <u>Observe</u> who interacts with who in a community

- Note how they are interacting with each other.

- Patterns of interaction constitute individuals's social networks.

- <u>Let the people define </u>their own social networks. Ask 'who are your best friends?'

- 'Name all the people you had conversation with yesterday''

- A researcher can build a network from all the answers.

Dense and Loose social networks

- A dense social network is one where all members know each other. If you ask five people, each one should mention the other four.

- Loose social network: not all members know each other

- Dense networks slow down or inhibit change. Members police each other's behaviour (consciously or unconsciously) because of the intensity of their contact

- Because in dense networks contacts with outside the network are comparatively superficial, there is less chance of being exposed to innovation from outside.

- Loose networks make people more open to change. The ties that individual members have to other networks provide an opportunity for them to be exposed to and pick innovations from outside their network.

Multiplex and uniplex ties within networks

- Net works can be distinguished in terms of the quality of the ties between individuals.

- <u>Uniplex tie</u>: if the network tie between two individuals is based on one relationship, e.g. the two people work together, or are family members, or have children in the same club.

- <u>Multiplex tie:</u> if two people know each other in several different roles, e.g best friends, and thy take the same courses at niversity, work together on weekends. (A three-way tie)

- A loose network based on uniplex ties is going to be more open to the introduction and transmission of innovations than dense networks where members share multiplex ties.

Language & power/ language & politeness

- The social relationship between the speaker and the hearer is indicated by his/her linguistic choices.

- (T/V) distinction: the choice between *Tu* (familiar form) and *vous* (the polite form) forms in languages, e.g. Latin, French, Italian German, Greek, (English once had thou/you distinction.

- According to Brown and Gilman (1960) it started as a sing. And plural difference. By medieval times, the upper classes began to use V with each other to show mutual respect…

- The asymmetrical T/V usage came to symbolize power relationship.

- Symmetrical V usage became polite usage, spread downward but not to the lowest classes.

- Symmetrical T usage to show intimacy or solidarity (strong common interest).

- This mutual T came to replace the mutual V of politeness because solidarity is more important in personal relationships.

Address terms

- How do you name or address another? By title (T), first name (FN) by last name (LN), nickname, by combination of these or by nothing at all.

- What factors govern the choice you make?

- Is the address process asymmetrical? Mr. Smith leads to John, or symmetrical?

- Family relationships

- Use of kinship terms for use as address terms

Politeness markers

- Politeness is prescribed, rules, norms.

- The concept of politeness is associated with Goffman (1967) study on face.

- Brown and Levinson (1987) define face as "the public self image that every member wants to claim for himself"

- They distinguished between Positive face vs. negative face.

- Positive face the desire to get the approval of others.

- Negative face the desire to be unimpeded by others in one's actions. Freedom of actions and freedom form impositions.