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For William Labov

whose work is referred to in every chapter and
whose ideas imbue every page
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Preface to the Second Edition

Publication of the first edition of *The Handbook of Language Variation and Change* in 2002 obviously filled a gap in the field. It was widely adopted as a learning, teaching, and reference tool for researchers and students in sociolinguistics, and it was also well used by scholars in numerous related fields seeking authoritative overviews of central topics and methods on language variation and change. The publication of this second edition, slightly more than a decade later, is necessitated by the continuing vigor of the field. In order to ensure that the *Handbook* remains the authoritative source on this vital approach to language study, we prepared a new edition that reflects the state-of-the-art in sociolinguistic studies.

Our goal remains exactly the same: we see the book as a convenient, hand-held repository of the essential knowledge about the study of language variation and change. We have maintained the core structure, the rationale and the focus that made the first edition so successful. The contributors, now as then, are leading researchers in their fields. About three-quarters of the original chapters have been retained but have been updated to reflect developments and new directions in each topic area. The extent of updating is suggested, perhaps, by the fact that two of the revised chapters have undergone title changes to mark new emphases, and three of the original authors have conscripted co-authors to work with them on new developments.

Seven chapters are entirely new, an appropriate reflection of the continuing vitality of the discipline in the intervening decade. Inevitably, some chapters from the first edition were discontinued in order to accommodate the new directions within manageable space limits. Those discontinued chapters remain valid, incisive treatments of their topics, and we expect that many of them will continue to be cited and referenced in their special areas for years to come.

We have invited the authors of the chapters to discuss the ideas – hypotheses, axioms, premises, probabilities – that drive their branch of the discipline, and to illustrate them with empirical studies, their own or others, that not only demonstrate their applications but also their shortcomings and strengths. We expect that these
areas will continue to attract ingenious researchers and engage curious students and other scholars.

After the “informal epistemology,” which immediately follows, the book is organized in eight broad subject areas beginning with data collection (Part I). It proceeds through methods for evaluating data (Part II) and categorizing it (Part III). From there, it moves into the main spheres of social influence including the complexities of time (Part IV), social distance and difference (Part V), and communal interactions, individual identities, and their interrelations (Part VI). The pervasive effect of mobility, both geographical and social, has implications for the social uses of language in diverse contact situations (Part VII). We end the book with Walt Wolfram’s forward-looking consideration of the ethical and social roles of sociolinguists in the communities they work in (Part VIII), a topic of increasing engagement among responsible scholars.

The contributors of the chapters make a distinguished international roster. Our invitations went to scholars with recognized expertise, either established or potential, with no thought to anything but their insightfulness and mastery of their research areas. As in the first edition, the final reckoning gives an accidental profile of the culture of sociolinguistics: 26 chapters by 30 scholars, 14 women and 16 men, from six nations. These numbers are all the more striking in the historical context. From its inception in a few rather isolated studies on the Atlantic seaboard of the United States, variationist sociolinguistics has spread globally in a few decades and established its stature inexorably among the language sciences. It is our hope that this new edition of *The Handbook of Language Variation and Change* will aid and abet its spread, as the first edition did, and deepen both the understanding of its goals and the appreciation of its results.

In light of the subject matter of the book, the publishers have acknowledged the diverse backgrounds of the contributors by retaining the mixture of US and UK style conventions across their various chapters.

J.K. Chambers and Natalie Schilling
Every effort has been made to trace copyright holders and to obtain their permission for the use of copyright material. The publisher apologizes for any errors or omissions in the text, and would be grateful if notified of any corrections that should be incorporated in reprints or future editions of this book.
Societies can obviously exist without language, as witness the social organizations of carpenter ants, honey bees and great apes. But languages cannot exist without societies. Language is quintessentially social, and throughout recorded history, normal human beings have shown unbounded capabilities for social intercourse, conversational interaction, repartee, self-expression, and tale-telling both real and imagined, all governed by intricate sets of conventions normally beneath consciousness.

Before language existed, our hominoid ancestors organized bands for food-gathering and habitats for sheltering their young; and probably, by analogy with the great apes, not much more. In the absence of language, finding daily sustenance and preventing yourself and your young from becoming sustenance for others are pretty much full-time activities. Since survival and propagation can be achieved in the absence of language, it was obviously not survival and propagation that called language into being. Rather, language is the tool for virtually every human aspiration beyond plain survival and propagation.

Sociolinguistics is the study of the social uses of language, in its many guises. In this chapter, I sketch an informal epistemology of sociolinguistics by outlining its historic development as a linguistic discipline (in Section 1), the persistence of social evaluation in language matters (in Section 2), the place of sociolinguistics among the linguistic sciences (in Section 3), and its relation to communicative competence (in Section 4) and to communicative intelligence (in Section 5).

1 Sociolinguistics as a Discipline

Studying the social uses of language proceeds mainly by observing language use in natural social settings and categorizing the linguistic variants according to their
social distribution. The most productive studies have emanated from determining the social evaluation of linguistic variants. These are also the areas most susceptible to scientific methods such as hypothesis-formulation, logical inference, and statistical testing.

Notwithstanding the pervasive effects of the social milieu on the accents and dialects which are its medium, the study of socially conditioned variation in language is relatively recent. Variationist sociolinguistics became an internationally recognized branch of the linguistic sciences in the 1970s. Its effective beginnings as a movement can be quite specifically traced to the early 1960s, when William Labov presented the first sociolinguistic research report at the annual meeting of the Linguistic Society of America (December 1962) and published “The social motivation of a sound change” (Labov 1963). Those events were not the first public airings of socially relevant linguistic studies, as we shall see, but they were far and away the most influential. Unlike the ones that came before, Labov’s initiatives inaugurated a discipline. One reason for their success, though probably not the most important one, was the relative maturity of the sociolinguistic framework that Labov had devised. His analyses introduced three striking innovations into the prevailing linguistic culture: (i) correlating linguistic variants with class, age, sex, and other social attributes, (ii) incorporating style as an independent variable, and (iii) apprehending the progress of linguistic changes in apparent time. All three are hallmarks of the sociolinguistic enterprise to this day.

Labov’s success was partly attributable to the simple fact that the time was ripe. Ancillary investigations into the social uses of language, including studies of discourse, pragmatics, interaction rituals, and subjective evaluation tests, sprang into being around the same time.

Labov recalls feeling considerable trepidation as he prepared to present his results in public for the first time. “In those days . . . , you practically addressed the entire profession when you advanced to the podium,” he recalled (in 1997). “I had imagined a long and bitter struggle for my ideas, where I would push the social conditioning of language against hopeless odds, and finally win belated recognition as my hair was turning gray. But my romantic imagination was cut short. They ate it up!” The easy reception may have obscured the revolutionary turn that sociolinguistics represents in the history of language study.

Advances in the nascent discipline came quickly. Labov’s methods gained breadth and depth with his own work on the social stratification of English in New York City (Labov 1966) and in a large-scale project based at Georgetown University on the inner-city African-American community in Detroit (Shuy, Wolfram and Riley 1968). The theoretical core of the new discipline was bolstered by a perspicacious statement on its empirical foundations (Weinreich, Labov and Herzog 1968), which stands as the manifesto for the enterprise. Sociolinguistics shook off any hints of anglocentric provincialism with studies of Montreal French (Sankoff and Sankoff 1973) and Panama City Spanish (Cedergren 1973). It also crossed national boundaries with studies in Norwich, England (Trudgill 1974), Edinburgh, Scotland (Reid 1978) and Belfast, Northern Ireland (Milroy and Milroy 1978). Word about these and other developments spread rapidly, months
and sometimes years before the official publications, through conference presenta-
tions, dissertations and working papers.

Enthusiasm for the new discipline was undeniably fanned by the revolutionary
zeal that went along with overturning some old pieties. Linguistic heterogeneity
had been banned in linguistic orthoadoxies from Saussure to Chomsky, and so were
its correlates such as social attributes, contextual style and apparent-time. Now
they were seen as liberating. “The key to a rational conception of language change
– indeed of language itself,” Weinreich, Labov and Herzog (1968: 100) declared,
“is the possibility of describing orderly differentiation in a language serving a
community.”

Before sociolinguistics gained a foothold in the second half of the twentieth
century, there had been a few maverick precursors. The term “sociolinguistics”
had been coined a decade before Labov’s inaugural presentation by one Haver C.
Currie in 1952, in a programmatic commentary on the notion that “social functions
and significations of speech factors offer a prolific field for research.” With bap-
tismal zeal, Currie (1952: 28) proclaimed, “This field is here designated sociolinguistics.” Nothing came of Currie’s suggestion, though the name stuck. Years
later, Labov expressed misgivings about the word itself. In 1972 (xiii), he wrote:
“I have resisted the term sociolinguistics for many years, since it implies that there
can be a successful linguistic theory or practice which is not social.” By then,
however, it was too late. Non-social linguistics did not disappear, and the term
sociolinguistics, like psycholinguistics, neurolinguistics and other academic deriv-
atives, serves its purpose.

Dialectology is sometimes viewed as a precursor of sociolinguistics but the
relationship between them is oblique rather than direct. Systematic dialectology
goes back to at least 1876 and thus antedates modern linguistics as well as socio-
linguistics. Both dialectology and sociolinguistics are in the broadest sense dialec-
tologies (studies of language variation). However, traditional dialectology
embraced the strictures of structural linguistics, concentrating on regional speech
patterns of mainly rural, old-fashioned speakers elicited one item at a time (Cham-
bens and Trudgill 1998: 13–31). In terms of intellectual history, sociolinguistics can
be viewed as a refocusing of traditional dialectology in response to cataclysmic
technological and social changes that required (and facilitated) freer data-gathering
methods using larger and more representative population samples (Chambers
2002). In its goals as well as it methods, it is a radical departure.

There is now a branch of sociolinguistic dialectology in which region is one
independent variable among the other social and stylistic variables (as in the
chapter by Britain in this volume). It is much more beholden to sociolinguistics
than to dialectology.

Traditional dialect studies with genuine sociolinguistic bearings are very rare.
The exception that proves the rule is Louis Gauchat’s study of vernaculars in the
Swiss village Charmey (1905 [2008]). Gauchat (1866–1942), professor of philology
at University of Zurich, visited the alpine village on several occasions and became
acutely aware of social stratification in the local dialect. He was also acutely aware
that this variability ran counter to the prevailing wisdom at the time, which held
that the dialect of an isolated village with a virtually immobile population should be homogeneous. “If unity can indeed exist in the speech of a village one would expect to find it in Charmey,” Gauchat said (1905 [2008: 228]). Instead, he found “variation in the pronunciation, morphology, syntax, and lexicon” (236). No doubt conscious of his renegade mission (though he never came right out and said so), Gauchat sets down the variation in an analysis rich in insight, thorough in detail and sound in argumentation. He emerges, in hindsight, as the patriarch of variationist linguistics (Chambers 2008). Some six decades before Labov, he correlated linguistic variants with sex, age, and social class, recognized style as an independent variable, and apprehended changes in progress with apparent-time comparisons.

Gauchat anticipated many of the postulates of Weinreich et al. (1968) as well as sociolinguistic methods. “Variation in pronunciation among members of a single speech community has not been studied systematically,” he says (1905 [2008: 227]), “despite its potential contribution to our understanding of language change.” He hoped his study might foment a sociolinguistic revolution, although he was too genteel to put it that way. What he did say was, “My reason . . . for making public these opinions I have formed on the unity of speech in a single community is to encourage dialectologists to undertake similar research in other places.” It did not happen. Gauchat’s work in Charmey was regarded as eccentric, and no one, not even Gauchat himself in the 30 years of his career that remained, saw fit to follow his lead.

Gauchat was clearly too far ahead of his time. The emergence of the international movement for socially perspicacious linguistic studies was in abeyance for six more decades.

2 Language as a Social Phenomenon

The late-blooming history of sociolinguistics appears paradoxical in view of the obvious social role of language. All societies tolerate and even foster social judgments of language use, and typically integrate them into the communal ethos, most conspicuously in developed nations where they become part of the institutional mandate of schools, government offices and professional societies. So persistent and pervasive are the social judgments of language use that they must be embedded in human nature, perhaps as an adjunct of human communicative competence (discussed below). They have been documented from the beginning of the written record. Thus Sirach, the Old Testament moralist, declared: “When a sieve is shaken, the rubbish is left behind; so too the defects of a person appear in speech. As the kiln tests the work of the potter, so the test of a person is conversation” (Ecclesiasticus 27: 4–5). And Cicero, in 55 BC, enjoins his readers to “learn to avoid not only the asperity of rustic pronunciation but the strangeness of outlandish [that is, regional] pronunciation” (De Oratore III, 12).

Value judgments like these, both ancient and modern, have purely social motivation. Linguistically, they are vacuous. This is readily demonstrated by comparing any pair of linguistic variants, such as these grammatical variants:
We don’t expect any help from the government.
We don’t expect no help from the government.

The two sentences differ in that the second one includes a negative marker on the object noun phrase (no help) as well as on the verb phrase (don’t expect), whereas the first one avoids the double negative by replacing the noun negator with any. Notwithstanding this difference, the two sentences convey exactly the same grammatical meaning and everyone who speaks English with even minimal competence recognizes their semantic identity.

The sentences do, however, convey very different social meanings as a direct consequence of the grammatical difference. That is, they carry sociolinguistic significance. The first, with its standard forms, is emblematic of middle-class or educated speech, while the second is emblematic of working-class or uneducated speech. These differences will also be readily recognized by virtually every speaker of the language.

The perceived superiority of the first sentence is obviously not linguistic, since the two sentences convey exactly the same meaning. Nor is it historical, since the second sentence, the nonstandard double negative, was in fact the standard construction until the fifteenth century, when any-suppletion came into the grammar as a competing form and ultimately prevailed as the preferred form. However, recognizing that social evaluations of sentences like these are arbitrary and conventional does not mean that they are inconsequential. On the contrary, people whose speech is judged adversely can suffer socially, occupationally and educationally (as discussed by Preston in this volume).

Because social judgments of linguistic forms have such a continuous and intimate relation to the human condition, it would be natural to expect a fairly long history of inquiry into the sources, functions and significations of language in its social context. Instead, as we have seen, it is relatively recent. Perhaps the social role of language was too commonplace to attract serious inquiry, but more likely it is so integral in language as to escape notice. The classical Greeks missed it entirely. Plato and Aristotle concerned themselves with categorizing linguistic forms, that is, with grammar in the sense discussed in the next section. Neither of them noticed linguistic variation of any kind, and their overwhelming influence on Western thought undoubtedly contributed to the antisocial bias of Western linguistic tradition. According to Kiparsky (1979), the Sanskrit grammarian Pāṇini. (ca. 600 BC) did recognize systematic variability, which he called anyatarasyāṃ, but his distinction was trivialized by his successors as meaning “marginal” or “unacceptable,” for which Pāṇini had actually used different terms. Pāṇini’s followers missed the distinction, and as a result Pāṇini’s insight had no impact on tradition.

The only classical scholar who seems to have been aware of the social side of language is the Roman polymath Varro (116–27 BC), who not only recognized linguistic variation (anomalia) but also linked it to vernacular language use (consuetudo; see Taylor 1975). Varro observed, among other things, the arbitrary nature of linguistic judgments. “The usage of speech is always shifting its position,” he
wrote (IX, 17; Kent 1938: 453). “This is why words of the better sort (i.e. morphologically regular forms) are wont to become worse, and worse words better; words spoken wrongly by some of the old-timers are . . . now spoken correctly, and some that were then spoken according to logical theory are now spoken wrongly.” One of Varro’s insights – *consuetudo loquendi est in motu* – could be emblazoned as the motto of sociolinguistics: “the vernacular is always in motion.” Unfortunately, Varro’s linguistic treatise, which survives only as a fragment, gave rise to no school of thought. He remains an isolated figure in the history of language study.

Enlightenment authors presupposed the social basis of language. Locke, in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690: 101), wrote: “God, having designed man for a sociable creature, made him not only with an inclination, and under a necessity to have fellowship with those of his kind, but furnished him also with language, which was to be the great instrument and common tie of society.” But the social uses of the instrument, under the presumption that it was God-given, were apparently deemed to be beyond human scrutiny.

Similarly, twentieth-century linguists dutifully enshrined the social function in their definitions. “Language is defined as the learned system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which human beings, as members of a society, interact and communicate in terms of their culture,” according to one introductory textbook (Trager 1972: 7). Bloomfield (1933: 42) said, “All the so-called higher activities of man – our specifically human activities – spring from the close adjustment among individuals which we call society, and this adjustment, in turn, is based upon language; the speech-community, therefore, is the most important kind of social group.” Firth (1937: 153) said, “speech is social ‘magic’. You learn your languages in stages as conditions of gradual incorporation into your social organization. . . . The approach to speech must consequently be sociological.”

Yet neither Bloomfield nor Firth nor any of the linguists who shared their structuralist concepts directly studied the social uses of language. Until the advent of sociolinguistics, there were no concentrated attempts at discovering the social significance of linguistic variation. That may be partly explicable in terms of intellectual history. All the social sciences are relatively young. Psychology, sociology, economics, and anthropology had their effective beginnings around the turn of the twentieth century, whereas subject areas less intimately involved with the human condition such as algebra, physics and zoology have ancient origins. Sociolinguistics, as the social-science branch of linguistics (along with developmental psycholinguistics), is a newcomer compared to the branch known as theoretical linguistics, which descends from venerable studies of grammar, rhetoric, and philology.

### 3 Linguistics and Sociolinguistics

In the development of modern linguistics, the shunting aside of the social significance of language was neither an oversight nor an accident. Saussure, the founder of modern linguistics, noted that “speech has both an individual and a social side,
and we cannot conceive of one without the other” (1916: 8). Inconceivable though it may have been for him to separate the individual and the social aspects, Saussure nevertheless advocated the study of the former without the latter. His famous distinction between langue, the grammatical system, and parole, the social uses of language, came into being expressly to demarcate what he considered the proper domain of linguistic study:

But what is langue? It is not to be confused with human speech [parole], of which it is only a definite part, though certainly an essential one. It [parole] is both a social product of the faculty of speech and a collection of necessary conventions that have been adopted by a social body to permit individuals to exercise that faculty. Taken as a whole, speech is many-sided and heterogeneous; straddling several areas simultaneously – physical, physiological, and psychological – it belongs to both the individual and to society; we cannot put it into any category of human facts, for we cannot discover its unity.

Language [langue], on the contrary, is a self-contained whole and a principle of classification. As soon as we give language first place among the facts of speech, we introduce a natural order into a mass that lends itself to no other classification.

(1916: 9)

Saussure’s dismissal of a possible science of parole seems curmudgeonly, with hindsight, but he was not alone. Before him, Humboldt had made a similar distinction between what he called a formless ergon and a well-formed energeia. Ergon (or parole) was “divided up into an infinity as the sole language in one and the same nation,” and energeia (or langue) was language in the abstract sense, with “these many variants . . . united into one language having a definite character” (1836: 129). After Saussure, Chomsky made a similar distinction between competence, “the speaker-hearer’s knowledge of his language,” and performance, “the actual use of language in concrete situations,” and he went on to say that “observed use of language . . . surely cannot constitute the actual subject matter of linguistics, if this is to be a serious discipline” (1965: 4). With hindsight, Chomsky’s dismissal seems not so much curmudgeonly, like Saussure’s, as myopic.

Humboldt, Saussure, and Chomsky were obviously right in pointing out that speech, parole, is heterogeneous, but they have been proven wrong in dismissing heterogeneity as a viable object of study. From the beginning, the challenge facing sociolinguistics, the science of parole, has been to arrive at an understanding of language as, in Weinreich, Labov, and Herzog’s phrase, “an object possessing orderly heterogeneity” (1968: 100).

4 Communicative Competence and the Language Faculty

Studying language as langue (or energeia or competence), as distinct from parole (or ergon or performance), requires abstracting linguistic data from the real-world variability in which it naturally occurs. Grammarians impose a hypothetical filter
on natural language data to make it invariant, discrete, and qualitative. The filter, called the axiom of categoricity (Chambers 2009: 26–28), has been described in numerous ways. Hjelmslev (1961: 5–6) states it this way: “Linguistics must attempt to grasp language, not as a conglomerate of non-linguistic (e.g. physical, physiological, psychological, logical, sociological) phenomena, but as a self-sufficient totality, a structure sui generis.” Joos (1950: 701) declared: “We must make our ‘linguistics’ a kind of mathematics within which inconsistency is by definition impossible.”

By contrast, sociolinguists attempt to grasp language as it is used in social situations, which is to say as variant, continuous, and quantitative. Langue and parole remain useful distinctions today for a reason that Saussure would undoubtedly have found unimaginable, because they now help to define the different objects of inquiry of theoretical linguistics and sociolinguistics. They are separable in theory as natural partitions of the language faculty, or what might plausibly be considered distinct cognitive systems.

Chomsky has put forward the conception of the language faculty as interacting systems conceived, in his words, as “‘mental organs’ analogous to the heart or the visual system or the system of motor coordination and planning” (1980: 39). Theoretical linguists who adopt the axiom of categoricity are primarily interested in discovering the properties of one of those systems of the language faculty, called grammar, conceived as a language-specific bioprogram (to use Bickerton’s incisive term: 1984, 2008: 110–113). The grammar is also known as “I-language, ‘I’ for internal and individual” (Lightfoot 2006: 7), presumably to avoid the ambiguity with “grammar” as a book of rules or language-learner’s manual. The internal grammar is “a person’s language organ, the system” (Lightfoot 2006: 7). It is made up of, in Chomsky’s terms (1980: 55), “a system of ‘computational’ rules and representations.” Attempts at discovering its innate computational properties have led Chomsky and his followers into minute examinations of surface-structure puzzles involving linguistic coreference, scope, and other structural intricacies. They have produced insights into the grammatical processor as “structure-dependent” rather than strictly linear (cf. Hurford 2008: 526) and, in Chomsky’s tenacious but disputed stance, as language-specific, not reducible to other, independently motivated, non-language-processing cognitive components.

The grammar is the module in the language faculty that accounts for the uniquely human attributes of creativity in language production and comprehension, and for the rapidity of language acquisition in infancy. However, it is obviously not autonomous. Linguistic production and comprehension require real-world orientation to express meanings, and the acquisition device requires the stimulus of social interaction to activate learning. Chomsky recognizes the existence of other systems, and he has isolated two of them as follows: “A fuller account of knowledge of language will consider the interactions of grammar and other systems, specifically the system of conceptual structures and pragmatic competence, and perhaps others” (1980: 92). The component that involves real-world orientation Chomsky calls the conceptual system, and the social stimulus
has its source in what Chomsky calls “pragmatic competence” but is generally called communicative competence.

By the conceptual system, Chomsky means “the system of object-reference and also such relations as ‘agent’, ‘goal’, ‘instrument’ and the like; what are sometimes called ‘thematic relations’” (1980: 54). “Object-reference” includes vocabulary items, the “massive inventory of form-to-meaning mappings” (Hurford 2008: 526) which are the most obvious intermediaries between grammar and the world. The conceptual system reveals uniquely human properties most easily discerned in acquisition. Children master fine semantic distinctions of the sort found in verbs such as follow and chase relatively early, certainly long before they can consciously define what they mean. These fine vocabulary distinctions recur in all natural languages. One way of explaining this mastery, Chomsky (1988: 31) says, is by postulating that words “enter into systematic structures based on certain elementary recurrent notions and principles of combination.” More generally, he says, “The rate of vocabulary acquisition is so high at certain stages of life, and the precision and delicacy of the concepts acquired so remarkable, that it seems necessary to conclude that in some manner the conceptual system with which lexical items are connected is already substantially in place” (1980: 139).

Chomsky’s third language module, “pragmatic competence,” pertains to, in his words, “knowledge of conditions and manner of appropriate use, in conformity with various purposes. . . . We might say that pragmatic competence places language in the institutional setting of its use, relating intentions and purposes to the linguistic means at hand” (1980: 224–225). This notion has a familiar ring to sociolinguists. It was influentially described by Hymes as “sociolinguistic competence” or communicative competence, as follows:

Within the social matrix in which [a child] acquires a system of grammar, a child acquires also a system of its use, regarding persons, places, purposes, other modes of communication, etc. – all the components of communicative events, together with attitudes and beliefs regarding them. There also develop patterns of the sequential use of language in conversation, address, standard routines, and the like. In such acquisition resides the child’s sociolinguistic competence (or, more broadly, communicative competence), its ability to participate in its society as not only a speaking, but also a communicating member. (1974: 75)

Hymes adds, “What children so acquire, an integrated theory of sociolinguistic description must be able to describe.”

Like the other organs of the language faculty, communicative competence develops early and rapidly in normal children with little or no tutoring. Since most of the conventions governing communicative events are beneath consciousness, explicit teaching is impossible in any case. Evidence for communicative competence as an entity independent of grammatical competence (and presumably the other organs of the language faculty) can be found, for instance, in pathologies in which people are forced to function with one in the absence of the other.
The independence (or modularity) of communicative competence is revealed in certain neurological disorders in which it is disturbed and disrupted. People suffering from what is called “semantic-pragmatic disorder” tend to interrupt the conversational flow with inappropriate or ill-timed assertions, fail to follow topics, introduce what appear to be digressions or non-sequiturs, and speak out of turn (Mogford-Bevan and Sadler 1991). Typically, their speech is phonologically and grammatically well-formed, and not infrequently their speech is remarkably fluent. Clinical researchers usually rely on standardized tests as diagnostic tools, but people with semantic-pragmatic disorder tend to score within normal ranges because of their grammatical fluency. As a result, descriptions of semantic-pragmatic disorder in the psycholinguistic literature often appear to be cursory and vague.

Recognizing it as a sociolinguistic disorder might persuade clinicians to use sociolinguistic observation and analysis for its description. In any event, what malfunctions in the people who are afflicted with the disorder is their communicative competence. They speak grammatically but they cannot carry a conversation. Just as myxedema proves the existence of the thyroid gland in the endocrine system (if proof were needed), so semantic-pragmatic disorders prove the existence of communicative competence as an autonomous module in the language faculty.

5 Interdependence of Language and Communication

Though communicative competence was admitted fairly late into the Chomskyan conception, it has taken on an increasingly important role in conceptualizations of the language faculty. As Brooks and Ragin (2008: 514) point out, “Language is not merely the product of a language-ready brain; it is a cultural product of a community of practitioners.”

Language and its social context are inseparable, but for Chomsky it does not follow that they are interdependent. “It is true, a virtual tautology, that the study of communication takes into account social context,” he says (2011: 266). “It is also uncontroversial that the study of the mechanisms that we put to use [in grammar] typically ignores social context, and quite rightly so.” Communication, in Chomsky’s schema, is the “externalization by the SM [sensory-motor] system” and, in his view, it “appears to be a secondary property of language” (2011: 275). The language faculty developed many millennia after the sensory-motor system, he claims, and “language use is only one of many forms of communication” (2011: 275). In Chomsky’s view, language use seems to be no more important in communication than are gestures, facial expressions, and eye-gaze cues (assuming he would include these sensory-motor reflexes among the “many forms of communication”), and in his conception none of these impinges upon or affects in any way the innate, unalterable language faculty.