AN INTRODUCTION TO
SOCIOLINGUISTICS
Blackwell Textbooks in Linguistics

The books included in this series provide comprehensive accounts of some of the most central and most rapidly developing areas of research in linguistics. Intended primarily for introductory and post-introductory students, they include exercises, discussion points and suggestions for further reading.

2. Andrew Spencer, *Morphological Theory*
3. Helen Goodluck, *Language Acquisition*
4. Ronald Wardhaugh and Janet M. Fuller, *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (Seventh Edition)
5. Martin Atkinson, *Children’s Syntax*
6. Diane Blakemore, *Understanding Utterances*
7. Michael Kenstowicz, *Phonology in Generative Grammar*
8. Deborah Schiffrin, *Approaches to Discourse*
12. Nigel Fabb, *Linguistics and Literature*
13. Irene Heim and Angelika Kratzer, *Semantics in Generative Grammar*
15. Stephen Crain and Diane Lillo-Martin, *An Introduction to Linguistic Theory and Language Acquisition*
16. Joan Bresnan, *Lexical-Functional Syntax*
23. Bruce Hayes, *Introductory Phonology*
24. Betty J. Birner, *Introduction to Pragmatics*
## Contents

Companion Website xiii

List of Figures xiv

List of Tables xv

Preface xvi

Acknowledgments xvii

1 Introduction 1
   Key Concepts 1
   Knowledge of Language 3
      Competence and performance 4
   Variation 5
   Speakers and Their Groups 7
   Language and Culture 10
      Directions of influence 10
      The Whorfian hypothesis 11
      Correlations 14
   The Boundaries of Sociolinguistics 15
   Methodological Concerns 17
      Data 18
      Research design 18
   Overview of the Book 19
   Chapter Summary 20
   Exercises 20
   Further Reading 22
   References 22
Part I  Languages and Communities 25

2 Languages, Dialects, and Varieties 27
   Key Concepts 27
   Language or Dialect? 28
      Mutual intelligibility 29
      The role of social identity 32
   Standardization 33
      The standard as an abstraction 34
      The standardization process 35
      The standard and language change 36
      Standard English? 36
      The standard–dialect hierarchy 37
   Regional Dialects 38
      Dialect continua 39
      Dialect geography 39
      Everyone has an accent 40
   Social Dialects 42
      Kiezdeutsch ‘neighborhood German’ 43
      Ethnic dialects 45
      African American Vernacular English 46
         Features of AAVE 47
         Development of AAVE 48
      Latino Englishes 50
   Styles, Registers, and Genres 52
      Style 52
      Register 53
      Genre 53
   Chapter Summary 54
   Exercises 54
   Further Reading 56
   References 57

3 Defining Groups 62
   Key Concepts 62
   Speech Communities 63
      Linguistic boundaries 63
      Shared norms 65
   Communities of Practice 68
   Social Networks 70
   Social Identities 72
   Beliefs about Language and Social Groups 74
      Ideologies 75
      Perceptual dialectology 76
Other Contact Varieties: Mixed Languages 131
Chapter Summary 133
Exercises 133
Further Reading 134
References 134

Part II Inherent Variety 139

6 Language Variation 141
Key Concepts 141
Regional Variation 142
Mapping dialects 142
Methods in dialectology 145
Dialect mixture and free variation 147
Linguistic atlases 147
The Linguistic Variable 148
Variants 149
Types of linguistic variables 149
Variation in New York City 150
Variation in Norwich 150
Variation in Detroit 151
Indicators, markers, and stereotypes 151
Social Variation 152
Social class membership 153
Social networks 157
Data Collection and Analysis 157
The observer's paradox 157
The sociolinguistic interview 158
Sampling 159
Apparent time and real time 161
Correlations: dependent and independent variables 161
Quantitative sociolinguistics 162
Chapter Summary 165
Exercises 165
Further Reading 166
References 166

7 Three Waves of Variation Studies 169
Key Concepts 169
The First Wave of Variation Studies 170
Early work on gender variation 170
The fourth floor 172
Variation in Norwich 175
Variation in Detroit 177
Contents

Ethnomethodology 235
  Background knowledge as part of communication 236
  Commonsense knowledge and practical reasoning 237
  Garfinkel and his students: studies in ethnomethodology 239
  Ethnomethodology and conversation analysis 241
Linguistic Ethnography 241
Chapter Summary 243
Exercises 243
Further Reading 245
References 245

10 Pragmatics 248
Key Concepts 248
Speech Acts 249
  Performatives 249
  Locutions, illocutionary acts, and perlocutions 251
Implicature 253
  Maxims 253
  The concept of cooperation 255
Politeness 256
  Face 256
  Positive and negative politeness 257
  Politeness world-wide 258
  Politeness and indirectness 261
Pronouns 263
  Tu and vous: power and solidarity 263
  Pronouns and positioning 266
Naming and Titles 266
  Fluidity and change in address terms 269
  Chinese comrades 270
Chapter Summary 272
Exercises 272
Further Reading 275
References 276

11 Discourse Analysis 280
Key Concepts 280
Conversation Analysis 281
  Adjacency pairs 283
  Openings 284
  Closings 285
  Turn-taking 287
  Repair 289
Institutional talk 290
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interactional Sociolinguistics</th>
<th>291</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data and methodologies</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextualization</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stance</td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercultural communication</td>
<td>297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Discourse Analysis</td>
<td>298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrasts and critiques</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodologies and connections</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Summary</td>
<td>302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercises</td>
<td>303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further Reading</td>
<td>304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>305</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Part IV  Sociolinguistics and Social Justice** 309

12  Language, Gender, and Sexuality 311
   Key Concepts 311
   Defining Terms: Gender, Sex Category, and Sexuality 312
   Sexist Language 314
      Grammatical gender marking 315
      Language change 316
   Discourses of Gender and Sexuality 319
      Some common Discourses 319
   Deficit, Dominance, Difference, and Identities 321
      Women's language 324
      Dominance 324
      Difference 325
      Gender and sexuality identities 328
   Chapter Summary 332
   Exercises 332
   Further Reading 333
   References 334

13  Sociolinguistics and Education 339
   Key Concepts 339
   Social Dialects and Education 341
      Restricted and elaborated codes 341
      Difference not deficit 343
      Role of the home dialect in education 345
   African American Vernacular English and education 346
   Applied sociolinguistics 350
   Multilingual Education 351
   Ideologies 351
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use of minority languages in the classroom</td>
<td>352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elite and immigrant bilingualism</td>
<td>354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education and World-Wide English</td>
<td>356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circles of English</td>
<td>356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elite closure</td>
<td>357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English in Europe</td>
<td>359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Summary</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercises</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further Reading</td>
<td>361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>362</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 14 Language Policy and Planning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key Concepts</td>
<td>367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terminology, Concepts, and Development of the Field</td>
<td>367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of language planning</td>
<td>368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The intellectual history of LPP</td>
<td>371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data and methods</td>
<td>372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LPP and Nationalization</td>
<td>373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LPP in Turkey: orthography and purity</td>
<td>373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LPP in the Soviet Union and the post-Soviet era:</td>
<td>375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from Russification to nationalization</td>
<td>377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official monolingualism in France</td>
<td>377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multilingual policy in Belgium</td>
<td>377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LPP in Post- and Neo-Colonial Contexts</td>
<td>378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LPP in the United States and Canada</td>
<td>381</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The United States of America</td>
<td>381</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multilingual Countries and LPP</td>
<td>385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papua New Guinea</td>
<td>385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endangered Languages and the Spread of English</td>
<td>387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endangered languages</td>
<td>387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English world-wide</td>
<td>388</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Summary</td>
<td>392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercises</td>
<td>392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further Reading</td>
<td>392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>393</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Glossary                                                               | 398  |
Index                                                                  | 422  |
This text has a comprehensive companion website which features a number of useful resources for instructors and students alike.

Instructors

- Chapter-by-chapter discussion points
- Solutions and sample answers to the explorations and exercises in the text.

Students

- Chapter-by-chapter study guide
- List of key terms
- Annotated key links.

Visit www.wiley.com/go/wardhaugh/sociolinguistics to access these materials.
List of Figures

Figure 4.1 Linguistic landscapes in Berlin, Germany: Café Happy Day 87
Figure 4.2 Linguistic landscapes in Berlin, Germany: Your multicultural fresh market 87
Figure 5.1 The life cycle model of pidgins and creoles 117
Figure 6.1 The Rhenish Fan 144
Figure 6.2 Isoglosses 144
Figure 6.3 H-dropping means for five social groups 163
Figure 6.4 H-dropping: within-group ranges for five social groups 164
Figure 7.1 ‘Model’ boy versus ‘typical’ boy: percentages of -ing versus -in’ use 171
Figure 7.2 ‘Model’ boy’s preference for -ing versus -in’ by formality of situation 171
Figure 7.3 Use of (r) pronunciation by department store 173
Figure 7.4 Pronunciation of (r) in New York City by social class and style of speech 174
Figure 7.5 Percentage of use of -in’ in four contextual styles of speech in Norwich 176
Figure 7.6 Percentage of [z] absence in third-person singular present tense agreement in Detroit Black speech 178
Figure 7.7 Percentage of (r) absence in words like farm and car in Detroit Black speech 179
Figure 8.1 The Northern Cities Vowel Shift 201
Figure 8.2 Degree of centralization of (ay) and (aw) by age level on Martha’s Vineyard 206
Figure 8.3 Degree of centralization and orientation toward Martha’s Vineyard 207
## List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.1</td>
<td>Pidgins and creoles by lexifier language</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 7.1</td>
<td>Percentage of [r] use in three New York City department stores</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 7.2</td>
<td>The (ng) variable in Norwich</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 7.3</td>
<td>Final cluster simplification among Black speakers in Washington, DC</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 7.4</td>
<td>Final cluster simplification among Black speakers in Detroit</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 7.5</td>
<td>Final cluster simplification in several varieties of English</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 8.1</td>
<td>Percentages of informants overreporting and underreporting variants in Norwich</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 10.1</td>
<td>Uses of <em>tongzhi</em> in 1980s China</td>
<td>271</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When I was asked to work on the seventh edition of *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* I jumped at the chance, having often used the textbook myself and knowing it was something I would be proud to have my name on. As I worked on the project, my respect for Ronald Wardhaugh only grew; the depth and breadth of his knowledge provides the basis for these chapters. While I am responsible for the content of this textbook, this project was only possible because I had as a starting point such excellent material.

The changes I have made are both thematic and organizational. Throughout the text, I have sought to incorporate research which reflects contemporary social theories, in particular social constructionist and critical approaches, as applied to the study of language in society. Further, I have sought to position sociolinguists as potential actors and activists, not objective observers who necessarily remain outside of the worlds they study; this perspective culminates in the final section, which has been titled ‘Sociolinguistics and Social Justice.’

In terms of chapter layout, some re-arrangement of the materials will be apparent to those who have used the textbook in the past. The first section contains chapters on the same topics, although with some different titles to the sixth edition. The second section has been updated, but retains its focus on variationist sociolinguistics. The section now titled ‘Language and Interaction’ contains chapters on ethnography, pragmatics, and discourse analysis. The final section on social justice continues to include chapters on language and gender (and sexuality) and language policy and planning, but also a chapter focusing on language and education in sociolinguistic research.

Finally, the seventh edition of *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* also has an accompanying website, where students can find a review guide, vocabulary lists, and links to related websites for each chapter. There are also materials for instructors, including discussion topics and guides to the explorations and exercises that are provided in the textbook.

May your introduction to sociolinguistics be the beginning of new interests and insights!

Janet M. Fuller
I would like to thank several friends and colleagues for taking the time to consult with me on topics in their expertise during the writing of this book – Matthew Gordon, on variationist sociolinguistics; Michael Aceto, on pidgin and creole linguistics; and Heike Wiese, on *Kiezdeutsch* ‘neighborhood German.’ Their support was much appreciated.

I am further indebted to Southern University of Illinois, and especially the Department of Anthropology, for granting me the sabbatical during which I did most of the work on this book, and to the John F. Kennedy Institute at the Freie Universität Berlin, and especially Director Irwin Collier, for support while on my sabbatical in 2013–2014.

This project could not have been carried out without the valuable feedback on this revision from Ronald Wardhaugh, and the help with content, formatting, and other logistics from the staff at Wiley-Blackwell. Their support and assistance was much appreciated.

Finally, as always I am grateful to my children for inspiration: Arlette, who has always helped me question everything I thought I knew, and Nicholas, who provided me with encouragement, explanations of pop culture, and tech support throughout this project.
Sociolinguistics is the study of our everyday lives – how language works in our casual conversations and the media we are exposed to, and the presence of societal norms, policies, and laws which address language. Since you are reading this book, you may already have some idea what the study of sociolinguistics entails; you may already have an interest in, and knowledge about, regional dialects, multilingualism, language policy, or non-sexist language. And we will cover all of these topics, along with many others – what social class and ethnicity might have to do with language use, why we do not always ‘say what we mean,’ the role of language in education.

But we would like to encourage readers to approach the study of sociolinguistics not as a collection of facts, but as a way of viewing the world around you. In sociolinguistics, we seek to analyze data so that we can make generalizations about...
language in society, but also to question both our findings and the very process of
doing research. Take, for instance, the topic of nicknames. There is a stereotype that
men use nicknames and women do not, exemplified in the following joke:

If Diana, Natalie, Naomi, and Maria meet for lunch, they will call each other
Diana, Natalie, Naomi, and Maria. But if Matt, Peter, Kirk, and Scott go out
for a brewsky, they will call each other Dutch, Dude, Doofus, and Pencil.

We could investigate this sociolinguistic phenomenon by surveying people about
their nicknames and also observing or recording interactions in which they are
addressed by close friends and family members. We might find, indeed, that the
men in our study are often called nicknames, while the women rarely are. But we
would like to go deeper than this generalization; why do we ask this question in the
first place? Why do we assume that the categories of ‘men’ and ‘women’ are socially
relevant? What is it about nicknames that makes using them, or not using them,
significant social behavior? And even if most men are called by a nickname and
most women are not, how do we explain the existence of individual men who do
not have nicknames, and the individual women who do?

Thus, while in sociolinguistics we do analyze speech with the goal of making
generalizations, we also question these generalizations and examine how they, in
turn, influence how we use language. In short, sociolinguistics is not a study of facts
(e.g., men call each other nicknames) but the study of ideas about how societal
norms are intertwined with our language use (e.g., what it means to be a male or
female member of a particular society may influence the terms we use to address
each other).

We will come back to these points repeatedly: language, society, and sociolin-
guistic research findings must all be viewed in their social contexts, interpreted, and
redefined. To begin, however, we will offer a starting point for discussing language
in society. By society, we mean a group of people who are drawn together for a
certain purpose or purposes; this is a rather vague and broad term, and throughout
this book we will be engaged in discussing how to draw meaningful boundaries
around a group of speakers for the purposes of studying their language. We use the
term language to mean a system of linguistic communication particular to a group;
this includes spoken, written, and signed modes of communication.

These terms are, as you will undoubtedly have noted, inextricably intertwined.
A society must have a language or languages in which to carry out its purposes, and
we label ways of speaking with reference to their speakers. This connection is inevi-
table and complex; our purpose here is to study the relationship between language
and society in more specific ways which help us more clearly define and understand
both the social groups and the ways they speak.

In this introductory chapter, we will present some of the basic concepts in the
field of sociolinguistics: what it means to ‘know’ a language, the nature of differences
across and within languages, the importance of social group membership in lan-
guage use, and different ideas about the relationship between the worldviews of
Introduction
these groups and the languages they speak. Further, we will outline the field of study in terms of approaches and methodologies.

Knowledge of Language

When two or more people communicate with each other, we can call the system they use a code. We should also note that speakers who are multilingual, that is, who have access to two or more codes, and who for one reason or another shift back and forth between these languages in some form of multilingual discourse (see chapter 4) are also using a linguistic system, but one which draws on more than one language. The system itself (or the grammar, to use a well-known technical term) is something that each speaker ‘knows,’ but two very important issues for linguists are (1) just what that knowledge comprises and (2) how we may best characterize it.

In practice, linguists do not find it at all easy to write grammars because the knowledge that people have of the languages they speak is extremely hard to describe. Anyone who knows a language knows much more about that language than is contained in any grammar book that attempts to describe the language. One of the issues here is that grammar books tend to be written as prescriptive works; that is, they seek to outline the standard language and how it ‘should’ be spoken. What sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropologists do is provide descriptive grammars of languages, which describe, analyze, and explain how people actually speak their languages.

One example of this difference can be found in the less/fewer distinction. Prescriptively, less should be used with non-count nouns, such as water, rice, or money; fewer is used with count nouns (or noun phrases) such as drops of water, grains of rice, or pesos. So something may be worth less money, but it costs fewer pesos. Descriptively, however, this distinction does not hold; less is often used with count nouns. Most notable is the common sign at US grocery stores indicating that certain cashier lines are for patrons with ‘ten items or less.’ Chances are you will also hear people saying things like there were less students present today than yesterday, although of course there may be some dialects of English where this distinction is still commonly employed.

While linguists are aware of prescriptive rules of language as dictated in reference grammars, the focus of linguistics is not prescriptive rules but the rules inside the heads of speakers which constitute their knowledge of how to speak the language. This knowledge that people have about the language(s) they speak is both something which every individual who speaks the language possesses and also some kind of shared knowledge. It is this shared knowledge that becomes the abstraction of a language, which is often seen as something which exists independent of speakers of a particular variety.

Today, most linguists agree that the knowledge speakers have of the languages they speak is knowledge of something quite abstract. It is a knowledge of underlying
rules and principles which allow us to produce new utterances. It is knowing what is part of the language and what is not, knowing both what it is possible to say and what it is not possible to say. Communication among people who speak the same language is possible because they share such knowledge, although how it is shared and how it is acquired are not well understood. Individuals have access to it and constantly show that they do so by using it properly. As we will see, a wide range of skills and activities is subsumed under this concept of ‘proper use.’

**Competence and performance**

Confronted with the task of trying to describe the grammar of a language like English, many linguists follow the approach associated with Chomsky, undoubtedly the most influential figure in linguistics for the last half century. Chomsky distinguishes between what he has called *competence* and *performance*. He claims that it is the linguist’s task to characterize what speakers know about their language, that is, their competence, not what they do with their language, that is, their performance. The best-known characterization of this distinction comes from Chomsky himself (1965, 3–4) in words which have been extensively quoted:

Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker–listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance. This seems to me to have been the position of the founders of modern general linguistics, and no cogent reason for modifying it has been offered. To study actual linguistic performance, we must consider the interaction of a variety of factors, of which the underlying competence of the speaker–hearer is only one. In this respect, study of language is no different from empirical investigation of other complex phenomena.

Pinker (2007, 74) points out the consequences of such a view: ‘Though linguists often theorize about a language as if it were the fixed protocol of a homogeneous community of idealized speakers, like the physicist’s frictionless plane and ideal gas, they also know that a real language is constantly being pushed and pulled at the margins by different speakers in different ways.’ It is just such ‘pushing and pulling’ that interests Labov, arguably the most influential figure in sociolinguistics in the last fifty or so years. He maintains (2006, 380) that ‘the linguistic behavior of individuals cannot be understood without knowledge of the communities that they belong to.’ This is the focus of sociolinguistics, and what makes it different from Chomskyan linguistics. We are primarily concerned with real language in use (what Chomsky calls performance) not the language of some ideal speaker (i.e., an idealized competence). This distinction is reflected in methodological differences; syntacticians such as Chomsky will often use grammatical judgments to get at
competence, while sociolinguists tend to use recordings of language use (see section below on methodologies, and chapter 11 on Discourse Analysis).

The knowledge that we will seek to explain involves more than knowledge of the grammar of the language, for it will become apparent that speakers know, or are in agreement about, more than that. Moreover, in their performance they behave systematically: their actions are not random; there is order. Knowing a language also means knowing how to use that language, since speakers know not only how to form sentences but also how to use them appropriately. There is therefore another kind of competence, sometimes called **communicative competence**, and the social aspects of that competence will be our concern here.

**Variation**

The competence–performance distinction just mentioned is one that holds intriguing possibilities for work in linguistics, but it is one that has also proved to be quite
troublesome, because the performance of different speakers, and the same speaker in different contexts, can vary quite a lot. For instance, speakers in some areas of the Midwestern United States might utter sentences such as ‘The car needs washed’ while others would say ‘The cars needs to be washed’ or ‘The car needs washing.’ Further, an individual speaker might use all three of these constructions at different times. (These different structures for expressing the same meaning are called variants; this term will be discussed in more detail in chapter 6.) For sociolinguists, this linguistic variation is a central topic. The language we use in everyday living is remarkably varied. There is variation across speakers, that is, reflections of different ways that people speak in different regions or social groups, but also variation within the speech of a single speaker. No one speaks the same way all the time, and people constantly exploit variation within the languages they speak for a wide variety of purposes. The consequence is a kind of paradox: while many linguists would like to view any language as a homogeneous entity, so that they can make the strongest possible theoretical generalizations, in actual fact that language will exhibit considerable internal variation. One claim we will be making throughout this book is that variation is an inherent characteristic of all languages at all times, and the patterns exhibited in this variation carry social meanings. (See the link to a website which provides an overview of the field, the sociolinguistics page for the PBS series Do You Speak American, in the materials associated with chapter 1 in the web guide to this textbook.)

The recognition of variation implies that we must recognize that a language is not just some kind of abstract object of study. It is also something that people use. Although some linguists, following Chomsky’s example, are focused on what language (as an abstraction) is, sociolinguists have argued that an asocial linguistics is scarcely worthwhile and that meaningful insights into language can be gained only if performance is included as part of the data which must be explained in a comprehensive theory of language. This is the view we will adopt here.

We will see that while there is considerable variation in the speech of any one individual, 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. You cannot pronounce words any way you please, inflect or not inflect words such as nouns and verbs arbitrarily, or make drastic alterations in word order in sentences as the mood suits you. If you do any or all of these things, the results will be unacceptable, even gibberish. The variation you are permitted has limits, and these limits can be described with considerable accuracy. For instance, we can say, ‘It is the fence that the cow jumped over,’ which is comprehensible if somewhat stilted, but most speakers would agree that ‘the fence jumped the cow over’ does not follow English word order rules and is largely incomprehensible. Individuals know the various limits (or norms), and that knowledge is both very precise and at the same time almost entirely unconscious. At the same time, it is also difficult to explain how individual speakers acquire knowledge of these norms of linguistic behavior, because they appear to be much more subtle than the norms that apply to such matters as social behavior, dress, and table manners.
Our task will be one of trying to specify the norms of linguistic behavior that exist in particular groups and then trying to account for individual behavior in terms of these norms. This task is particularly interesting because most people have no conscious awareness of how their linguistic behavior is conditioned by social norms. We will also see how the variation we find in language allows changes to occur over time and often points to the direction of change. A living language not only varies, it changes.

**Exploration 1.2: Variation in Greetings**

How do you greet your friends, your family, your colleagues, your professors and your acquaintances? Are there different verbal exchanges as well as different embodied practices (e.g., air kisses, shaking hands, fist bump)? Does the situation matter – that is, do you greet your family differently if you have not seen them for a long time, or friends in different ways depending on whether you run into each other by accident on campus or if you are meeting for dinner? Are there ways of greeting, either that you use or that you do not use, that index membership in particular groups? Are there ways of greeting that you find inappropriate – in general, or for particular addressees or in particular situations? Compare your own repertoires and practices with those of the other students in your class.

**Speakers and Their Groups**

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’ (Krosktrity 2000, 111). Our special focus is on how language constructs speaker identity.

In such a view, identities are not preconceived categorical affiliations such as ‘male’ or ‘female’ but nuanced ways of being that we construct; while we may indeed reference such categories, our identities are not simply a matter of listing demographic identifiers (e.g., ‘single white female, 45, architect, nature lover’). So while
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. We will revisit this concept of multiple identities throughout this text because it is highly relevant to our study of language in society.

So far, we have said that the term ‘society’ refers to a group of people unified through some purpose; other concepts such as ‘speech community,’ ‘social network,’ and ‘community of practice’ will be found in the pages that follow (see especially sections devoted to these concepts in chapter 3). We will see how these are useful if we wish to refer to groups of various kinds, since it is among groups that individuals form relationships or reject such a possibility. The groups can be long-lasting or temporary, large or small, close-knit or casual, and formally or informally organized. This is, therefore, another level of complexity we must acknowledge in the pages that follow as we refer to ‘middle class,’ ‘women,’ ‘speakers of Haitian Creole,’ ‘teenagers,’ and so on. We must remember that these categorizations also have a process side to them: all must be enacted, performed, or reproduced in order to exist. Socio-economic class, gender, language background, and age are only important aspects of our identities and groups if we choose to organize our lives in that way; in some contexts they may not be salient social categories and we may instead see ourselves as members of groups based on racial identification, sexual orientation, national belonging, or membership of a particular formal social group (e.g., a Choir, a professional association, or a fox hunting club).

In all of the above we must recognize that 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.
Bourdieu (1991) conceives of languages as symbolic marketplaces in which some people have more control of the goods than others because certain languages or varieties have been endowed with more symbolic power than others and have therefore been given a greater value. For example, speaking – and especially writing – what is considered the standard language in a given community (see discussion of this in chapter 2) is often necessary to gain employment, may open doors in terms of finding housing, and may lend the speaker more authority even in casual conversations. We cannot escape such issues of power in considering language, social relationships, and the **construction of social identities**. In chapter 2, we will address the issue of standard languages and issues of societal power; in chapter 11 we will discuss the interaction of language and power within social relationships; in chapter 12 we will address gendered aspects of power; and in chapters 13 and 14 we will discuss institutionalized power relationships between the speakers of particular languages (or particular varieties of languages).

**Solidarity** refers to the motivations which cause individuals to act together and to feel a common bond which influences their social actions. Thus the concept of solidarity is intertwined with both identity formation and group formation. We know that people can unite for all kinds of reasons, some of which they may not even be able to articulate, and the consequences may be great or small. We will also look at some of the consequences for language behavior. For instance, in the next chapter, we will discuss how a sense of belonging contributes to the classification of a particular code as a language or a dialect. In chapter 3, we will look more at how people use language to construct their identities as members of particular groups. Much variationist work (discussed in chapters 6–8) rests on the idea that the use of particular linguistic features corresponds with desired membership in particular social groups; in chapters 9 and 11, we look at how this can be examined with qualitative methods.

---

**Exploration 1.3: Idiolects**

An idiolect is an individual’s way of speaking, including sounds, words, grammar, and style. The first author of this book, Wardhaugh, speaks in such a way that he is regarded as North American almost everywhere he goes but in certain aspects shows his origins in the north of England. He pronounces *grass* and *bath* with the vowel of *cat*, does not pronounce the *r*s in *car* and *cart*, and distinguishes the vowels in *cot* and *caught* (and pronounces the latter word exactly like *court*). He also distinguishes the vowels in *Mary*, *merry*, and *marry*. He sometimes pronounces *book* to rhyme with *Luke*, and finds he has to watch his pronunciation of *work* because he
Language and Culture

There is a tradition of study in linguistic anthropology which addresses the relationship between language and culture. By ‘culture’ in this context we do not mean ‘high culture,’ that is, the appreciation of music, literature, the arts, and so on. Rather, we adopt Goodenough’s well-known definition (1957, 167): ‘a society’s culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members, and to do so in any role that they accept for any one of themselves.’ Such knowledge is socially acquired: the necessary behaviors are learned and do not come from any kind of genetic endowment. Culture, therefore, is the ‘know-how’ that a person must possess to get through the task of daily living; for language use, this is similar to the concept of communicative competence we introduced above. The key issue addressed here is the nature of the relationship between a specific language and the culture in which it is used.

Directions of influence

There are several possible relationships between language and culture. One is that social structure may either influence or determine linguistic structure and/or behavior. Certain evidence may be adduced to support this view. For instance, given the evidence of the age-grading phenomenon (i.e., young children speak differently from older children, and, in turn, children speak differently from mature adults), we could argue that the social organization of age groups influences the language used in these groups. Another possible piece of evidence for this direction of influence is studies which show that the varieties of language that speakers use reflect such matters as their regional, social, or ethnic origin and possibly even their gender.