ESL 5302 - Social & Psychological Aspects of Language

**Aug. 25, 2011**

Sociolinguistics → the study of the relationship between language and society

What is "society"? Same nation, same beliefs, same purposes

Language – Society can have one language or several.

Language is also called "code." The language that we use is, in fact, a code that we use in communication. All the members of a given society know the code; that is a condition of being part of that society.

Chomsky –

importance of language universals (characteristics or features that all languages possess)

1. learnability of the language - all normal members of a society can learn the code of that society

2. There are rules and principles governing the use of language (grammar).

Also, Chomsky differentiates between *language competence* and *language performance*. He believes that the focus or the interest that linguists have should concentrate on competence -- the knowledge speakers have about language -- and not on their performance (how they use the language). Chomsky says we should address competence in our research, not performance. This belief is NOT shared by all scholars, however. Nowadays, we focus on performance (language in use). It's the application of the knowledge of language in real speech situations.

Is performance perfect? No. Not with native speakers or language learners.

Variation –

How can you define variation in the use of language? Language has several possibilities of expression; there are so many ways of expressing something. Theoretically, there are no limits to linguistic imagination! We still create language, new words and phrases, new uses for old words and phrases, etc. The variations have boundaries that are set by norms, principles governing the language.

Identity –

Socialization of the members of the society, power status of members, etc. - The variables impose some norms on the use of language as far as variation is concerned.

What is "linguistic identity"?

One's perspective on the world outside ourselves; the lens through which we look at the world. (Bilinguals have 2 lenses, 2 identities, e.g.)

Some factors that affect identity:

1. race

2. ethnicity

3. gender

4. religion

5. occupation

6. physical location

7. social class

8. kinship

9. leisure activities

We can speak about individual identity and group identity, but let's talk about power -- Power is another norm of linguistic behavior that has an impact on the relationship between language and society. The social status, the influence that one individual can have on the group -- that is power.

Perspectives of language:

Structural point of view – Sasseur (sp?) → The language of the group… [wtf is this about? doesn’t make much sense] When studying oral language we should study the language of the group? Then the language used by individual speakers as a whole? [Is this is the book?] Sasseur was a lecturer, not a writer, at a university in Switzerland. After his death, his students compiled their notes and wrote, "Le Treaty du Languistique General" (The General Treatise on Language, 1959)

Another perspective – Sounds of language

Bloomfield - the most important characteristic of language is that its sounds are contrastive (phonemes that represent different sounds to contrast and make different words: bin vs. pin, where /b/ and /p/ contrast)

Third perspective – (4th?)

Pike, 1967 - Emic and Etic (eeeemic and ehtic)

The science of sounds has two important branches: phonology and phonetics.

* Phonetics - mechanical characteristics of sounds, how we pronounce them, where they are articulate.
* Phonology - studies how sounds combine, the relationships between sounds, how they influence each other, function of sounds

Phonetic vs. phonemic → You can make a comparison between etic and emic perspectives that is similar to the distinction between phonetics and phonemics.

* etic → Structure of language (e.g., contrastive nature of /b/ and /p/)
* emic → Function of individual linguistic units in the system of language (e.g., aspiration of /p/ before a vowel, as in "pen.")

Yet another perspective (Very modern and in favor now) – Study of language universals

Talmy, 1998 -- the typology of languages; a VERY narrow perspective to classify languages

Classifies languages from the point of view of verbs that express motion. Talmy says there are 2 major categories of languages:

1. satellite-framed languages

2. verb-framed languages

From the p.o.v. of motion verbs, we have these two categories of languages, and these languages express the manner of movement and the trajectory of movement differently. Namely, the satellite-framed languages will express the trajectory or path of the movement in satellites, i.e., little words that follow the verb (adverbs, prepositions, e.g.). English is a satellite-framed language: "He went out of the room." Went - movement, out of - trajectory. Verb-framed languages express the trajectory and the movement together in the verb itself. (English uses "exit" and "enter;" Romance languages are verb-framed.)

As far as the relationship between language and society is concerned, there are 4 main types of relationships.

1. Social structure may either influence or determine linguistic structure.
2. Linguistic structure may either influence or determine social structure.

(Sapir-Whorf, Slobin, et al.)

1. Language and society can influence each other.
2. There is no relationship between language and society.

(not supported any more, but Chomsky used to favor this idea; he said we were born with universal grammar and knowledge of language; language ability is innate ability, he said; not supported by data from real-life situations)

The textbook differentiates between sociolinguistics and sociology of language. (p. 12)

*Sociolinguistics* is the study of language from the perspective of language at a micro level, whereas *sociology of language* studies this relationship from a macro level.

* Sociolinguistics - specific linguistic behaviors in specific cases
* Sociology of language - general issues concerning the relationship between language and society

Concerns re: sociolinguistics –

Collecting data seems to be complicated and challenging because there are several emotional variables that intervene; it's the study of language used by real people in real situations. How we use language is a HUGE part of who we are, so people are often shy or reluctant to express themselves, especially when they know they are subjects of a study.

The tendency is to use language more carefully: (1) people want to present themselves in a good light, (2) they feel the need to help the researcher; they want to give "good" data, which is usually not authentic data. People think they are being judged or assessed, so they think by giving "good" data, they are helping, but they're not.

Textbook presents a list of types of sociolinguistic studies:

* correlational studies - focus on two or more variables; the more variables you take into account, the more difficult the study's data is to interpret
* implicational studies - studies that look at "if x, then y," the implication or result of something
* microlinguistic studies - specific individual differences and their social implications
* macrolinguistic studies - characterized by massive amounts of data because they focus on group relationships

**Bell, 1976** - 8 principles/axioms that sociolinguists should follow when investigating relationship between language and society:

1. cumulative principle - The more you know about language, the more you find out about it.
2. uniformation principle - The linguistic processes that take place nowadays are the same as those taking place in the past. (e.g., we add words to our vocabulary based on what happens in our lives - new words like e-mail, internet, cell phone, etc.)
3. convergence principle - We should collect new data in order to confirm or interpret old findings: replica studies. You replicate an older study by collecting and analyzing new data to compare/contrast conclusions and discover what caused the differences/similarities (sociolinguistic factors affecting the use of language nowadays).
4. subordinate shift principle - If you ask speakers of non-standard variety of language to speak about the way they use language, they will become more and more standard as they speak about their own personal use of language. {Norwich, Labov studies}
5. principle of style shifting - code switching
6. principle of attention - The more aware the speakers are of their speech, the more formal they become. (related to principle of subordinate shift)
7. vernacular principle - the lack of attention paid to the speech performance. Linguists are not in agreement as far as the lack of attention people have in using the language in using the vernacular. According to some, it's NOT a lack of attention but a different structure of the same language. Vernaculars have a structure of their own.
8. principle of formality - opposite of vernacular principle - There is much conscious attention paid to the speech used and close following of descriptive speech norms; you follow the norms of the prestigious variant of the language. How do you classify variants? What are your criteria for "prestige" and "no prestige"?

The general American English variant is the standard, although there is technically no official standard. General American variant is just that: It's understood by the general public in the United States. It does not contain very specific regional linguistic units.

NB: It's "general" - not "standard." It's what we use to communicate with people across the country.

**Sept. 1, 2011**

Chapter 2 - Languages, Dialects, and Varieties

What is language variety?

Forms of expression of a language

Language is an abstract term; it exists through its variety.

Cf. phonemes and allophones

I speak language. What language? English. What type of English? American English (as distinct from British English, Canadian English, Australian English, etc.) Then you can go to regional differences, class differences, age differences within a variety of a language. Different factors influence how language is being performed.

cf. Hudson and Ferguson's definition (1972) - p. 23

Hymes - language boundaries between groups are marked not only by linguistic items but by attitude and social meanings -- that is culture!

Language and dialect - from a strictly linguistic point of view, language variety and dialect are synonyms. From a social point of view, they are NOT.

Dialect, in the social context, is associated with low class, disadvantaged regions. Negative connotation socially.

Haugen (1966) - p. 24-25 - considers language and dialect ambiguous terms. Language is a set of linguistic norms that are followed by all the users. Dialect is only one of those norms.

As linguists, we use varieties and dialects interchangeable. As teachers, we should use the term language variety to eliminate the stigma of the word dialect.

In other cultures, French e.g., there is a distinction between un dialecte and un patois (p. 25).

un dialecte - regional variety used in literary works, e.g., Balzac's use of southern French variety

un patois - regional variety NOT used in literary works, no written works in patois; patois has negative connotation as being substandard and wrong

Another distinction: vernacular and koine --

vernacular - language variety spoken in a family

koine' - form of speech shared by different vernacular speakers (p. 25); koine has linguistic elements and patterns that are taken from different vernaculars

Socially, there are other criteria that "help" distinguish and discriminate between vernaculars and language varieties: age, status, money, influence, etc. (socially imposed factors that have nothing to do with linguistics)

Standard English - the version of English that some people think is the best variety of English. Who are these people? High-up folks, usually in a language academy in a country, but not in America. Prescriptivists.

Our role as language teachers is to encourage our students to preserve their local dialect, their vernacular. For their benefit, though, we should explain to them the language situations where their vernacular is appropriate and where they should switch to the standard version of the language.

Seven criteria set by Bell in 1976 (p. 31ff)

1. standardization, p. 31-36

2. vitality, p. 36-37

3. historicity, p. 37

4. autonomy, p. 37

5. reduction, p. 37-38

6. mixture, p. 38

7. de facto norms, p. 38-39

from Bell, 1976, pp. 147-57

1. standardization - p. 31-36  - the process by which a language has been codified in some way. Standard forms are a kind of variety that have norms that are accepted by a large group of speakers. Preferred pattern since it serves the larger group, not because it's better or sounds more correct but because it unifies the nation linguistically. Standardization is not permanent except in dead languages like classical Greek and Latin.

2. vitality - p. 36-37 - the existence of a living community of speakers; this criterion can be used to distinguish languages that are "alive" from those that are "dead."

3. historicity - p. 37 - refers to the fact that a particular group of people finds a sense of identity through using a particular language: it belongs to them. (e.g., unification of Germany using the German language)

4. autonomy - p. 37 - a language is must be felt by its speakers to be different from other languages

5. reduction - p. 37 - refers to the fact that a particular variety may be regarded as a sub-variety rather than as an independent entity

6. mixture - p. 38 - refers to feelings speakers have about the "purity" of the variety they speak; some speakers will not use features found in dialects because they feel they are "substandard" (cf. info on creoles and pidgins)

7. de facto norms - p. 38 - refers to the feelings that many speakers have that there are both "good" speakers and "poor" speakers and that the good speakers represent the norms of proper usage (cf. "linguistic purism," p. 39)

Regional dialects, p. 41ff

show differences in all levels of language

(more info on dialect/patois, p. 41)

dialect continuum - p. 42 -- varieties of the same language that have differences at all levels but they also have common elements (that's what makes them varieties rather than distinct languages)

boundaries of dialect continuum - set by the intelligibility of the linguistic forms rather than geographic boundaries. There is a branch called dialect geography, which sets boundaries based on geography, but it includes history and linguistic patterns (p. 43). The REAL boundaries are set by looking at the intelligibility of the structures and then drawing a map marking the end of one area and the next. These boundaries are called isoglosses. Where isoglosses coincide, we have a dialect boundary.

dialect vs. accent -  p. 43

Dialect is a language variety, but accent is the difference in the way a word is pronounced. However, each dialect has its own accents, and some accents can help distinguish varieties. Accents are more biologically drawn than socially drawn; you sound like who you grew up around. You need to be acknowledged as part of a certain group, and all the intruders need to be identified as "other" and different. Accents are not only something that pertain to humans: birds, dolphins, and other animals have accents, too. Accents help identify potential threats. It's an innate feature of all creatures.

Received Pronunciation (RP) - p. 43-45 -- standardized British English

Quark considers the only variety of English that is acceptable is the British English. He's against the other dialects. He's against "world Englishes." [Look in notes from Testing class about this - Braj Kachru from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign]

We cannot speak of unaccented varieties of language.

Social dialects, p. 46

Established according to social norms and social factors. Science that studies social dialects is social dialectology, p. 47.

Factors contributing to social dialects:

occupation, place of residence, education, money (new money vs. old money), religion, and ethnicity -- these are all social constructs invented by society

"Whereas regional dialects are geographically base, social dialects originate among social groups and are related to a variety of factors, the principal ones apparently being social class, religion, and ethnicity." (p. 46)

Styles vs. registers, p. 47ff

Style refers to the level or degree of formality a speaker uses. (p. 47-48) - varies according to age, emotions, particular task (writing vs. speaking, e.g.), type of occasion, etc.

Registers are sets of language items associated with specific occupational or social groups (p. 48). Teachers have a register, surgeons have another register, e.g. (similar to "jargon" but jargon has a negative connotation by most people; linguists don't use jargon as a negative - it's the same as register, just like dialect has no negative connotation among linguists)

("argo" - terms used by thieves?? look this up)

Style deals with formality; register with occupation.

Chapter ends with a list of misconceptions, falsehoods - p. 50

- Some languages lack grammar.

- English can be spoken without an accent.

- French is more logical than English.

- Parents teach their children how to speak.

- Primitive languages exist (language in incipient phase; languages exist that are not complex or subtle).

- English is degenerating, and language standards are slipping.

- Pronunciation should be based on spelling.

- etc.

Cameron (1995) calls the attempt to "clean up" various aspects of language "verbal hygiene."

**Sept. 8, 2011**

I was absent tonight during the discussion of pidgins and creoles.

**Sept. 15, 2011**

Chapter 4 – cf. notes in Bb

**Sept. 22, 2011**

Chapter 5

**Sept. 29, 2011**

Chapter 6