

**Introduction to Developmental
linguistics, Sociolinguistics,
Psycholinguistics and Neuro-
linguistics**

Sociolinguistics

- Sociolinguistics can be defined as the descriptive study of the effects of different aspects of society, including cultural norms, expectations, and context, on the way language is used, and society's effect on language.
- Sociolinguistics overlaps considerably with pragmatics. It is historically closely related to linguistic anthropology, and the distinction between the two fields has been questioned.

- **Varieties of Language**
- A standard language is a variety of language that is used by governments, in the media, in schools and for international communication. There are different standard varieties of English in the world:
 - British English
 - North American English,
 - Australian English
 - Indian English, etc.

- **Standard Variety**
- It is an idealized variety, because it has no specific region. It is associated with administrative, commercial and educational centers, printed in newspapers and books, and used in the mass media regardless of region.
- It is more easily described in terms of the written language (i.e., vocabulary, spelling, grammar) than the spoken language.
- **Vernacular Language**
- A vernacular language is the native language or native dialect (usually colloquial or informal) of a specific population.
- It is distinguished from a literary, national or standard variety of the language, or a lingua franca.
- It is used in the region or state inhabited by that population, and is spoken by the ordinary people of a country or region.

- **Regional Dialects**
- The study of regional dialects is called dialectology.
- **A dialect is a variety which is associated with a particular geographic area and differs from other varieties mostly because of its phonological and lexical features.**
- Dialect atlases (maps displaying dialect information within a certain geographical area) are used to describe geographical dialects. The boundaries between dialects are represented by lines called isoglosses. They are drawn with respect to one linguistic feature. When a number of isoglosses more or less overlap, a dialect boundary is drawn.
- However, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish dialects because one dialect merges into another. The result is dialect continuum, which means that dialect boundaries are not marked sharply.
- The information about the usage of particular linguistic units in a geographical area is gathered using questionnaires.
- Informants are asked to indicate which word or type of pronunciation they use. There are regional dialects both in the United Kingdom and the United States.

- **Slang, jargon and argot**
- Slang is informal, nonstandard vocabulary used by a particular group of people to establish contact, to mark their identity as a group, to create an effect, etc. Slang usage is typical of teenage speech or other speech communities that share interests and activities (e.g. music style, sports, etc.). Here are some examples slang words:
- Expressions for money: bucks, dough, bread, beans, brass, cabbage.
- Expressions for a stupid person: nerd, jerk, loony, boob, nincompoop,
- jackass.
- Expressions for drinking alcohol: to be on the booze, to hit the bottle, to bend the elbow.

- **Jargon;** refers to words and technical terms used by specialists of a profession or a group of people sharing a certain activity, hobby or occupation. These terms are usually not understood by the non-members. Practically every field of activity has its jargon. The excessive use of jargon may cause irritation of the outsiders if they feel that they have a right to understand the speech of the professionals (e.g. in law or medicine).
- **Argot ;** is a special vocabulary used by a secretive social group with the aim to protect its members from outsiders. Argot may be a vocabulary of criminals, terrorists or street gangs.

- **Register**
- Register is a variety of language defined according to its use in social situations and different contexts.
- A person's choice of vocabulary also reveals something about the relationship he or she has with the person who is listening (or reading).
- The two sentences **Stop talking, please.** and **Shut up, will you?** Have the same meaning.
- The first sentence belongs to formal register – it is appropriate in formal or neutral situations. The second sentence is impolite. It could be used in a highly informal situation or, maybe, jokingly, talking with a friend.

- **Pidgin and Creole**
- A simplified speech used for communication between people with different languages.
- In some areas, the standard chosen may be a variety that originally had no native speakers in the country.
- For example, Tok Pisin, an English-based creole, used as a commercial and administrative language by over 2 million people in Papua New Guinea which began many years earlier as a kind of “contact”.
- A pidgin is a variety of a language that developed for some practical purpose, such as trading among people not knowing each other’s languages.
- It will be described as an ‘English pidgin’ if English is the lexifier language, that is, the main source of words in the pidgin.
- No same pronunciation or meaning as in the source is used. The word gras has its origins in the English word ‘grass’, in Tok Pisin for ‘hair’. It is part of mausgras (‘moustache’) and gras bilong fes (‘beard’)

Creole

- When a pidgin develops beyond its role as a trade or contact language and becomes the first language of a social community, it is described as a creole.
- Tok Pisin is now a creole. Although still locally referred to as 'Pidgin', the language spoken by a large number of people in Hawai'i is also a creole, technically known as Hawai'i Creole English.
- A creole initially develops as the first language of children growing up in a pidgin-using community and becomes more complex as it serves more communicative purposes.

Psycholinguistics and Neuro-linguistics

- Psycholinguistics or psychology of language is the study of the psychological and neurobiological factors that enable humans to acquire, use, comprehend and produce language. The discipline is mainly concerned with the mechanisms in which languages are processed and represented in the brain.
- Psycholinguistics has roots in education and philosophy, and covers the 'cognitive processes' that make it possible to generate a grammatical and meaningful sentence out of vocabulary and grammatical structures

- **Neurolinguistics**
- The study of the relationship between language and the brain is called 'Neurolinguistics'.
- The field of study dates back to the nineteenth century when the location of language in the brain was an early challenge.

■ **Broca's Area and Wernicke's Area**

- Broca's area or the Broca area is a region in the frontal lobe of the dominant hemisphere of the hominid brain with functions linked to speech production. Language processing has been linked to Broca's area.
- Since Pierre Paul Broca reported impairments in two patients. The part shown as in the illustration is technically described as the "anterior speech cortex" or, more usually, as Broca's area.
- Paul Broca, a French surgeon, reported in the 1860s that damage to this specific part of the brain was related to extreme difficulty in producing speech.
- It was noted that damage to the corresponding area on the right hemisphere had no such effect. This finding was first used to argue that language ability must be located in the left hemisphere and since then has been treated as an indication that Broca's area is crucially involved in the production of speech.

Wernicke's Area

- A region of the brain concerned with the comprehension of language, located in the cortex of the dominant temporal lobe.
- Damage in this area causes Wernicke's aphasia, characterized by superficially fluent, grammatical speech but an inability to use or understand more than the most basic nouns and verbs.
- This finding confirmed the left hemisphere location of language ability and led to the view that Wernicke's area is part of the brain crucially involved in the understanding of speech

Important Schools and Theorists: Prague, Copenhagen, London

- **The Prague School**
- The Prague school comprised a fairly large group of scholars, mainly European, who, though they may not themselves have been members of the Linguistic Circle of Prague, derived their inspiration from the work of Vilém Mathesius, Nikolay Trubetskoy, Roman Jakobson and other scholars based in Prague in the decade preceding World War II.
- The most characteristic feature of the Prague school approach is its combination of structuralism with functionalism. The term 'functionalism' has been used in a variety of senses in linguistics.
- Here it is to be understood as implying an appreciation of the diversity of functions fulfilled by language and a theoretical recognition that the structure of languages is in large part determined by their characteristic functions.
- Functionalism, taken in this sense, manifests itself in many of the more particular tenets of Prague school doctrine.

The Prague school

- The Prague school was best known for its work on phonology. Unlike the American phonologists, Trubetskoy and his followers did not take the phoneme to be the minimal unit of analysis.
- Instead, they defined phonemes as sets of distinctive features. For example, in English, /b/ differs from /p/ in the same way that /d/ differs from /t/ and /g/ from /k/. Just how they differ in terms of their articulation is a complex question.
- Each phoneme, then, is composed of a number of articulatory features and is distinguished by the presence or absence of at least one feature from every other phoneme in the language. The distinctive function of phonemes, can be related to the cognitive function of language.
- This distinctive feature analysis of Prague school phonology as developed by Jakobson became part of the generally accepted framework for generative phonology.

- Two other kinds of phonologically relevant function were also recognized by linguists of the Prague school: **expressive and demarcative.**
- The term demarcative is applied to those elements that in particular languages serve to indicate the occurrence of the boundaries of words and phrases and, presumably, make it easier to identify such grammatical units in the stream of speech.

- The notion of markedness was first developed in Prague school phonology but was subsequently extended to morphology and syntax.
- When two phonemes are distinguished by the presence or absence of a single distinctive feature, one of them is said to be marked and the other unmarked for the feature in question. For example, /b/ is marked and /p/ unmarked with respect to voicing.
- Similarly, in morphology, the regular English verb can be said to be marked for past tense (by the suffixation of *-ed*) but to be unmarked in the present (*compare* “jumped” versus “jump”).
- It is often the case that a morphologically unmarked form has a wider range of occurrences and a less definite meaning than a morphologically marked form.

Copenhagen

- The Danish linguist and semiotician, Louis Hjelmslev, who founded the Copenhagen Linguistic Circle, attempted to render more rigorous and clear Saussure's general theory of language and semiotics. In particular, Hjelmslev is remembered as the inventor of *Glossematik* (glossematics), and for having given a new rigour to the notion of connotation.

- Hjelmslev also considers language to be a system of signs, and so it is important to be clear about the nature of the sign. First of all, we note that no sign exists by itself in isolation; rather, signs are always in a context in relation to other signs.
- To mark this fact, Hjelmslev speaks not about a sign as such, but about a sign function. A function he defines as 'a dependence that fulfils the conditions for an analysis'

- Just as there is a function between a class and its components, so there is a function between a sign and its components, 'expression' and 'content'.
- A sign, in short, is not some mark, or gesture with intrinsic qualities (an arrow might not always be a sign), but is what functions as a sign in a given context.
- For a sign function to exist, then, there must be – again, in Hjelmslev's terminology – an 'expression' and a 'content'

- **Glossematics**

- The reason for this elaboration of the sign-function, says our author, is to demonstrate that the sign is not simply a label for a pre-existing thing.
- It also means avoiding the artificial divisions in linguistics between 'phonetics, morphology, syntax, lexicography and semantics'.
- Indeed, so concerned is Hjelmslev to get the study of language on to a new footing that he invoked the name of 'glossematics' (from the Greek glossa, meaning 'language') to signal the innovative nature of his approach.

London

- The London school of linguistics is involved with the study of language on the descriptive plane (synchrony), the distinguishing of structural (syntagmatics) and systemic (paradigmatics) concepts, and the social aspects of language. In the forefront is semantics.
- The school's primary contribution to linguistics has been
 - i) **the situational theory of meaning in semantics** (the dependence of the meaning of a linguistic unit on its use in a standard context by a definite person; functional variations in speech are distinguished on the basis of typical contexts)
 - ii) **the prosodic analysis in phonology** (the consideration of the phenomena accruing to a sound: the number and nature of syllables, the character of sound sequences, morpheme boundaries, stress, and so on).The distinctive function is considered to be the primary function of a phoneme.

- The London school rejects the concepts of the speech collective and social experience and studies the speech of the individual person; it is subject to terminological and methodological inaccuracy and proves in many aspects to be linguistics of speech and not language.



American Structuralism—Saussure, Firth, Halliday, Sapir, Bloomfield and Chomsky

- Saussure
- Ferdinand de Saussure, born on 26 November 1857, was a Swiss linguist. His ideas laid a foundation for many significant developments in both linguistics and semiology in the 20th century. He is widely considered one of the founders of 20th-century linguistics and one of two major founders (together with Charles Sanders Peirce) of semiotics/semiology.
- Saussure had a major impact on the development of linguistic theory in the first half of the 20th century.
- His two currents of thought emerged independently of each other, one in Europe, the other in America. The results of each incorporated the basic notions of Saussure's thought in forming the central tenets of structural linguistics.
- According to him, linguistic entities are parts of a system and are defined by their relations to one another within said system

- Saussure defines linguistics as the study of language, and as the study of the manifestations of human speech.
- He says that linguistics is also concerned with the history of languages, and with the social or cultural influences that shape the development of language.
- Saussure draws a distinction between language (*langue*) and the activity of speaking (*parole*). **Speaking is an activity of the individual;** language is the social manifestation of speech. Language is a system of signs that evolves from the activity of speech.

- Language is a link between thought and sound, and is a means for thought to be expressed as sound.
- Thoughts have to become ordered, and sounds have to be articulated, for language to occur.
- Saussure says that language is really a borderland between thought and sound, where thought and sound combine to provide communication

- Spoken language includes the communication of concepts by means of sound-images from the speaker to the listener.
- Language is a product of the speaker's communication of signs to the listener. Saussure says that a linguistic sign is a combination of a concept and a sound-image.
- The concept is what is signified, and the sound-image is the signifier.
- The combination of the signifier and the signified is arbitrary; i.e., any sound-image can conceivably be used to signify a particular concept.

- A sign can be altered by a change in the relationship between the signifier and the signified.
- According to Saussure, changes in linguistic signs originate in changes in the social activity of speech.
- Saussure says that linguistic signs are by nature linear, because they represent a span in a single dimension. Auditory signifiers are linear, because they succeed each other or form a chain. Visual signifiers, in contrast, may be grouped simultaneously in several dimensions.

- Saussure defines semiology as the study of signs, and says that linguistics is a part of semiology.
- He maintains that written language exists for the purpose of representing spoken language. A written word is an image of a vocal sign.
- Saussure argues that language is a structured system of arbitrary signs. On the other hand, symbols are not arbitrary.
- A symbol may be a signifier, but in contrast to a sign, a symbol is never completely arbitrary. A symbol has a rational relationship with what is signified.

- Linguistic signs may, to a varying extent, be changeable or unchangeable. Deterrents to linguistic change include: the arbitrary nature of signs, the multiplicity of signs necessary to form a language, and the complexity of the structure of language.
- Factors that promote change in language include: individual variation in the use of language, and the extent to which language can be influenced by social forces.

- Saussure distinguishes between *synchronic* (static) linguistics and *diachronic* (evolutionary) linguistics. Synchronic linguistics is the study of language at a particular point in time.
- Diachronic linguistics is the study of the history or evolution of language.
- According to Saussure, diachronic change originates in the social activity of speech. Changes occur in individual patterns of speaking before becoming more widely accepted as a part of language.
- Speaking is an activity which involves oral and auditory communication between individuals. Language is the set of rules by which individuals are able to understand each other

- Saussure says that nothing enters written language without having been tested in spoken language.² Language is changed by the rearranging and reinterpreting of its units. A unit is a segment of the spoken chain that corresponds to a particular concept.
- Saussure explains that the units of language can have a synchronic or diachronic arrangement.
- Saussure's investigation of structural linguistics gives us a clear and concise presentation of the view that language can be described in terms of structural units.
- He explains that this structural aspect means that language also represents a system of values. Linguistic value can be viewed as a quality of the signified, the signifier, or the complete sign.

- The linguistic value of a word (a signifier) comes from its property of standing for a concept (the signified).
- The value of the signified comes from its relation to other concepts. The value of the complete sign comes from the way in which it unites the signifier and the signified.

- Thus, Saussure shows that the meaning or signification of signs is established by their relation to each other. The relation of signs to each other forms the structure of language. Synchronic reality is found in the structure of language at a given point in time.
- Diachronic reality is found in changes of language over a period of time.
- Saussure views language as having an inner duality, which is manifested by the interaction of the synchronic and diachronic, the syntagmatic and associative, the signifier and signified